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SYOMUSHKIN

ALITET GOES
TO THE
HILLS

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Tikhon Syomushkin

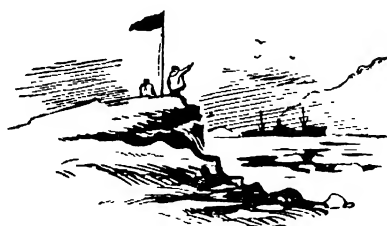
ALITET
GOES
TO THE HILLS



ТИХОН СЕМУШКИН

АЛИТЕТ УХОДИТ В ГОРЫ

РОМАН



Издание 2-е

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва 1922

TIKHON SYOMUSHKIN

ALITE GOES TO THE HILLS

A NOVEL



Second Edition

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**TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
BY B. ISAACS**

**ILLUSTRATED AND DESIGNED
BY Y. GOLIAKHOVSKY**

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FOREWORD

I first visited the Chukotsk Peninsula in 1924 as a member of a government expedition for the liquidation of a foreign concession, which later figured in my novel *Alilet Goes to the Hills* under the name of "North Company."

My knowledge of this remote and rugged country, gleaned from ethnographical literature by Russian explorers at a time when I was still a student of the Moscow University, was very scanty and fragmentary.

Here, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, a vast new land with extraordinary natural features was revealed to me, a native of the temperate zone of Central Russia.

The striking peculiarities of this northern country, its vast sweeping expanses captivated me from the very start, and my life has been linked up with the Soviet Arctic districts ever since.

The chief interests of this country lay in its people. The cold shores of the Arctic Ocean were sparsely populated by trappers and hunters of sea beasts who led a primitive mode of life.

They dressed in the skins of animals and lived in dwellings that only remotely resembled the habitations of human beings. They led a miserable existence. Yet, for all that, these people preserved excellent moral qualities. The longer I lived among them the better I got to know their amazing honesty, kindness and hospitality.

Here, too, lived so-called representatives of civilization—avaricious wolfish hucksters of diverse nationalities, for the most part Americans. All these white men, in whose veins ran black blood, cruelly exploited the honest and trustful hunters. The Chukchi, reduced to a state of dire poverty, were dying out, like the numerous Indian tribes in America, subjugated by the enterprising civilizers.

The country had no schools, no medical services. We did not meet a single man along the coast who could read or write. The people were steeped in superstitions and ignorance.

It was only natural that we, representatives of the Soviet regime, could not reconcile ourselves to such a state of affairs on Soviet soil, and launched a fight for the people's regeneration, a fight against the exploiters, both the local and the foreign brand.

At that time I conceived the idea of writing a novel based on the clash of interests among people representing diametrically opposed social categories.

The character study of a type of brutal colonizer did not strike me as being very difficult of accomplishment, all the more that I already had a general idea of the type from wide reading.

The portrayal of Chukchi life, however, presented greater difficulties. I realized that a genuine work of fiction was inconceivable without a deep study of these people's mode of life, customs and language. It was then I decided to live with these simple warm-hearted people until I had got to know them.

Deeply impressed, I took my leave of Chukotsk, resolved to return again at the first opportunity. And I came back the next year as chief of a statistic and economic expedition.

I lived another year on the wild coast, amid the majestic mountains of Chukotsk, amid the crash of Arctic pack ice and howling blizzards, among people about whom I had decided to write a truthful book and whom I was now able to use as living characters for that book.

During that year I travelled over twelve thousand kilometres on dog- and reindeer-teams. Often we were caught in a blizzard, through the stinging murk of which not even the running dogs were visible. Sitting in the sled, side by side with your team-driver, who was also your guide, you placed your life entirely in his hands. You haven't the faintest notion what tracks his dogs are following, but you are sure he will bring you safely to your destination. You trust him utterly, that man whose aspect speaks of a pure and simple heart. Wise in the ways of the North, he tells you:

"We can't go on, it's dangerous. We may fall over a cliff. The wind is too strong for the dogs. We must sleep the night here."

The first time I heard this suggestion, I was reduced to despair. Sitting in the sled, almost freezing, I was longing for this weary trail to end.

"But where are we going to sleep?" I asked my guide in alarm.

"Right here, where we stand. We shall sleep in the snow."

The wind tears the tent out of our hands. We pitch it at last after a hard struggle and take refuge in it from the snowstorm. We crawl into our sleeping bags, a stearine candle burns in the tent, the primus stove roars, we eat tinned food and drink hot tea—life goes on. And it is not at all as bad as I had feared. Later I got used to such bivouacs, so much so that I began to look forward to them as a welcome rest during the long trail. The blizzard rages for three or four days without intermission, and I and my guide are the only two in a desolate world! What a lot he tells me during that time! The trail draws men together, and I acquire a new friend.

Journeys such as these always provided me with rich material.

My work completed, I left Chukotsk again, but returned the next year. Two years later I came back as organizer of a boarding school and culture service base. My work in this sphere enabled me to make a closer study of the Chukchi children. While accumulating observations and getting a deeper insight into life, I learned to think in the Chukchi language, and not until then did I sit down to write a book—my first attempt to satisfy an old literary craving.

My first book was a story dealing with the Chukchi boarding school, translations of which were published in English, Swedish, Icelandic and many other languages.

A long period of preparation preceded my novel *Alitet Goes to the Hills*. I was working on Regional Studies and had completed a second census of the Chukotsk, and only after the lapse of eight Arctic winters did I feel myself more or less armed for the task.

All the characters of this book are from real life. Mr. Thompson, Simons, Harry Brown and others are all prototypes of men I have actually met and studied.

The Chukchi characters have likewise been taken from real life. Boys like Yarak, Vaamcho and Aye I met by the hundred. I met Chukchi *kulaks*, who, like Alitet, enriched themselves at the expense of the people, and served as agents of the foreign residents—they were a fairly widespread class along the coast.

The scale of socialist construction, the changes that are taking place in our country are stupendous. Returning to a thinly populated place after an absence of three to five years, you find a big town there. A new forest of full-grown firs now rises above the dust-bowl of the steppe, a brimming canal flows through the once dead desert. These swift changes are a characteristic feature of our

socialist construction, and I witnessed the same revolutionary transformations on Chukotsk in 1951.

Among the snow-powdered rocks, where one could barely pass on a dog-team, there now stood two-storied wooden houses lit up by electricity. Where we had dragged sacks of coal on our backs to the steamer, there is now a mechanized wharf with cranes and transporters.

We used to come out here on freighters. Now we made the voyage in comfortable passenger turbine steamers. Planes ply along a normally operating air line. Here, on its distant outposts, as everywhere throughout the Soviet Union, socialist construction is in full swing.

Regenerated life on the cold land has conquered the dead wastes.

The Soviets have awakened the Chukchi people to cultural and political life.

Teeming herds of reindeer graze on the vast territories of Chukotsk. Most of the herds are united in collective reindeer farms. There are already millionaire farms, possessing tens of thousands of reindeer. During the war the reindeer breeders of Chukotsk, together with all the other Soviet peoples, defended the new Soviet laws of life against the Nazi invaders and their war efforts won the acknowledgment of the great Stalin.

Sea-hunting kolkhozes have been organized all along the coast, equipped on up-to-date industrial lines. The frail cockleshells—*bidarkas*—built of drawn skins, which served as a means of capture, are becoming a thing of the past. They have been replaced by whale-boats, cutters, schooners and seiners with a displacement of up to five hundred tons. All these craft are worked by machinery and operated by the Chukchi hunters themselves. The improved level of culture and welfare among the people strikes the eye at every step.

General elementary education has been introduced throughout the Chukotsk. In the larger settlements and towns secondary schools, Teachers' Training Schools, vocational schools and all kinds of courses (commercial, bookkeeping, civil service, farm-chairman classes) have been opened.

You will not come across illiterate youngsters in Chukotsk these days.

Every year, for many years running, Chukchi boys and girls leave for Petropavlovsk-on-Kamchatka, Nikolayevsk-on-Amur, Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Moscow to continue their education. Over two hundred Northerners are studying at the present time in the Zhdanov University and the Herzen Teachers' Training College in Leningrad. More and more representatives of the Northern peoples are yearly swelling the ranks of the new Soviet intelligentsia. More than half the entire teaching staff in the Chukotsk schools consists of members of the local population.

The young men of the North graduate secondary school at home and travel to the Mainland to continue their education in the universities where they pass the usual matriculation examinations without any allowances being made for cultural backwardness, as in the early years of the Soviet government.

Urban settlements, industrial centres, canneries and fish products factories, manufacturing plants and bone-carving workshops have sprung up in Chukotsk.

A Chukotsk National Area comprising five districts, was formed in 1932. The Chukchi have learned the art of directing all the political, social, economic and cultural activities of their country. The Executive Committee of the Area Soviet, for instance, is headed by a native Chukchi named Otke. He received his education in Leningrad. In 1951 Otke was elected Deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. from the Chukotsk National Area.

Speaking at a session of the Area Soviet in Anadyr, reindeer breeder Talvavtln expressed the thoughts of his people in the following words:

"I have lived many long years. It seems to me as if a great layer of snow and ice had lain on our past life. And then Comrade Stalin helped us to break that cold layer and climb out into the sunshine, and now no snow or ice hinders us from looking far ahead. We are living an entirely new, interesting and intelligent life, which will grow still better and more interesting. I know that well, for I have eyes. Here they are."

T. Syomushkin

BOOK ONE






in 7

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE



IT HAD BEEN quiet since the morning, and man's voice was carried far and wide. The sea was calm, rising and falling in a gentle swell.

Towards evening a boisterous north wind sprang up. The sea grew rough. Its waves steadily mounted, their boom and roar re-echoing among the hills. The people of the Enmakai settlement had come down to the seashore to meet the hunters from the walrus grounds.

Intently scanning the stormy sea they hailed each other in loud, anxious voices. Their bulky fur-clad figures stood out sharply against the white background of the snow, which had not yet melted in these parts. The wind strengthened. Huge billows crashed down on the beach, where they broke and receded in seething foam.

"Alitet! Alitet! Alite-et!" a boy standing on the cliff suddenly shouted in a piercing voice.

He kept on shrieking intently towards the sea, proud of the fact that he had been the first to espy Alitet.

The sail of a whaling boat came in sight on the skyline. It appeared richly hued on the crest of the wave to vanish again, plunging into the black chasm. All talk had ceased.

Old Vaal, the great hunter, hobbled towards a group of excited women. He was clad in a threadbare deerskin parka neatly girded with a seal thong. His stern face, marked with deep-furrowed lines of bitterness, wore an air of equanimity and worldly wisdom. All this old man's life had been spent on the sea. He had looked death in the face many a time, and people respected his word.

Peering with rapidly blinking eyes at the stormy sea, he said gravely and knowingly:

"It is not dangerous to sail in a whaleboat in a rough sea—she is made of wood and has a proper keel. . . ."

And cupping together his shrivelled hands he showed how the keel was shaped.

"Now the flat-bottom skin boats are bad in a rough sea. They are likely to capsize."

The old man spoke of things that were familiar to everybody, but people nevertheless listened to him attentively and with special deference. Now and then the women stole anxious looks seawards. They all knew that the hunters took extra precautions in such weather by tying inflated seal bladders to the sides of their boats. Nevertheless they were unable to suppress a feeling of anxiety for their husbands.

Far out at sea the skin boats, too, came in sight, bare specks in the distance, bobbing up and down on the waves.

The whaleboat raced towards the shore in full sail. Its keel cleaved the waves, drawing nearer and nearer. The huge sail caught every gust of wind.

When the whaleboat drew close to the shore the sail dropped, covering the carcasses of the walruses on the deck.

On the bow stood the stocky figure of Tumatuge, the hunter. He held in his hand a long thin thong coiled up in a little hoop and kept a watchful eye on the waves, making ready to cast it ashore. The boat reared high on

the waves, but Tumatuge stood poised with his feet firmly planted, balancing his body to the lurching of the vessel. His head was bared. His clothes dripped with the dashing spray. The hunters sat in the whaleboat tensely watching the breakers.

As the boat was thrown up on the crest of a huge wave Tumatuge flung the coil ashore with a powerful sweep of the hand, but it was carried back by the receding wave.

The boat rocked on the surge for a long time, controlled by the crew's oars. And many times did Tumatuge ineffectually throw his line.

Old Vaal sat apart, puffing at a big wooden pipe and watching the whaleboat. Suddenly he swiftly threw off his torbazes,* tucked up his trousers, and, snatching a coil similar to that of Tumatuge's out of a boy's hand, he ran down to the water's edge. And after a huge wave had receded he plunged in after it with the speed and agility of a youth. With a strong sweep the old man deftly threw the coil around Tumatuge's neck, then spun round and raced back with still greater speed to avoid a new oncoming wave. He dropped onto the snow, panting. The women rushed to help him on with his boots.

"Plenty of strength but not enough skill," said Vaal, nodding with a smile towards the hunters.

The people standing on the shore pulled in the tow-line from the whaleboat. The old man got up. He stood calmly and attentively watching the breakers, counting them.

The people took hold of the line, casting glances at the old man and waiting for his command.

The hunters ceaselessly plied their oars to keep the boat from rising on the crest of a big wave before time.

Moccasins—skin boots.—*Trans.*

The old man let several big breakers pass, crying out to the people to keep a tight hold on the line. Suddenly Vaal sprang into the air and shouted with all his might: "To-hok!"

The people on shore instantly threw their weight on the line and hauled in the boat with cries and clamour. The breaker dashed itself on the beach and swept back, leaving the whaleboat grounded in the snow.

A short, thickset man with a muscular neck jumped swiftly out of the boat. His weather-beaten face with its high cheekbones was almost brown. Darting black eyes in narrow slits glittered beneath an American celluloid eyeshade which he wore as a protection against the sun. True, the sun had long since disappeared behind the clouds, but Alitet never parted with his shade—he had a predilection for things American. His bare head was framed by a crop of black, lank hair, as stiff and bristly as whalebone. It covered his ears and almost the whole of his forehead. The crown was a shining patch shaved clean to the skin. Alitet's face and the whole of his stocky figure bespoke strength, tenacity and cruelty. He was dressed in a sealskin jacket girded by a long oil-lamp wick in place of the usual seal-hide thong. From this girdle hung numerous charms in the shape of bits of hide, a red bead, a miniature bone engraving of a walrus and a twenty-cent coin. The whaleboat, too, was bedecked with a variety of charms. They were a protection against evil spirits, calamities, and sickness, and brought luck in life and trade. Alitet's heart was cheered by the successful outcome of the walrus hunt.

"There are no walruses close by!" he told his tribesmen who clustered around him. "The walrus swims far from shore. Way there, far away!" and Alitet made a sweeping gesture towards the sea.

He turned to the whaleboat and rapped out in a stern voice:

"Hi, you there! Drag the boat clear of the waves! Have you gone blind—the mark will get washed off!"

The mark was the date "1916" drawn on the boat's side in black paint. The American who had sold Alitet the whaleboat had painted it with his own hand. Alitet had touched up the mark once a year for four years, until the figures "1916" had now become "1016." This token of good luck, which had laid the foundation for a life of prosperity, Alitet guarded with superstitious care.



"Get the boat out of the way, hurry up!" he bawled at the top of his voice.

The men scrambled about the boat and dragged it over the hard snow. There was a lot of meat in the boat—the flesh of three walruses. On top of the bloody carcasses lay eleven walrus heads with long curved tusks.

Tumatuge took the biggest head by its tusks and lifted it out over the side with difficulty. He thrust it with the tusks in the snow. Soon the snow around the whaleboat was saturated with blood. Tumatuge pulled out the eleventh head and placed it in line with the rest. The whiskered heads of the walruses with big open eyes stood in a row in the snow looking almost alive.

Alitet knows that his friend the Merican requires only the tusks! The meat could be thrown back into the sea. Besides, the boat could not carry more than three walruses.

The women, with their children perched on their shoulders, stood at the water's edge. They chewed sea cabbage and gazed silently and intently at the boats out at sea.

"No, the walruses are far away! The boat hunters did not make a single kill," said Alitet with a self-satis-

fied smile. "My whaleboat is strong and swift, like a reindeer. The walrus cannot escape me. She is worth the six polar bear skins and the two sacks of white and red fox skins I gave Charlie for her, not counting the heap of walrus tusks I threw in extra!" Alitet made a deprecatory gesture towards the sea, adding: "Going out for game on a skin boat is just the same as chasing a fox without a rifle."

Old man Vaal went up to the walrus heads, eyed them sadly and said:

"How much meat wasted! How much food lost! Eight whole walruses! Good food thrown into the sea."

"The Merican would not bring me a bad whaleboat," said Alitet, paying no heed to the old man, and stepped over to where the walrus carcasses had been dumped.

The dogs had flocked here from all over the settlement. They sat around docilely in a semi-circle, their intelligent eyes fixed on the carcasses, licking their chops. They betrayed occasional signs of impatience by protracted whines and snappings. The less patient gobbled up chunks of blood-soaked snow.

There had not been any meat for a long time. With the cessation of the sledge trail the dogs were no longer fed. Emaciated and mangy-looking, with tufts of fur hanging down their flanks, they prowled about the settlement, fighting viciously over thrown-out bones. Dogs ran away into the tundra, turned wild and lived on marmots and ground squirrels. Alitet's dogs alone were in fine fettle. Alitet was fond of good dogs.

One hound, succumbing to the ordeal, made a dash for the meat.

"Guit! Wait your turn! I, too, am waiting patiently for a bit of meat," shouted Vaal and drove it off with his crutch.

The dog leapt weakly aside and looked sulkily at the old man.

Alitet, with narrowed eyes, was examining a big walrus head. He pulled the tusks out of the snow, turned the head round and measured the tusk with his right hand.

"Fine tusks. There'll be twenty pounds in each."

None of the hunters had any idea of this "pound," or for that matter of any measures of weight. Alitet, who had constant dealings with Charlie, was the only one who knew perfectly well what a pound was.

Charles Thompson, the owner of the fur trading post, had chosen Alitet as his agent and had taught him, for the fun of the thing, to weigh walrus tusks on English scales.

And Alitet now spoke of pounds merely for the sake of showing off his knowledge in such an important matter and letting people know what a well-versed man he, Alitet, was. Narrowing his shifty eyes, he said:

"Dogs cannot understand a man's speech. Neither can our people understand what a pound is. But I know what a pound is!"—and Alitet laughed triumphantly, baring his strong white teeth.

"No, Alitet," said old man Vaal, shaking his head, "you should not laugh. Dogs do understand a man's speech. But they don't want to talk to him. That's what I think," ended up the old man soberly.

Alitet scowled at him.

"What are you talking about, old man? Have you left your wits in your yarang*?"

Vaal, after a moment's silence, blinked and said didactically:

"Every head, Alitet, is a source of understanding. Both man and beast, and even the little bird—all have understanding. If our people sold tusk to Charlie Red Nose themselves, and not through you, they, too, would know what a pound is."

* A native tent dwelling made of skins.—*Trans.*

"Why do you call him Red Nose? Don't you know he does not like it?"

"You cannot call a red fox white. He is what he is," said the old man. Whereupon he picked his way carefully and unhurriedly towards the women.

Alitet glared after him, spat and joined the hunters. They had already laid the walrus heads on a sledge, harnessed themselves to it in single file and were dragging it off to Alitet's yarang.

Without waiting for the hungry people's requests Alitet cried:

"Let each man take a piece of meat into his yarang! Everyone needs food. The boat hunters will not bring in meat all the same. So let me feed the people!" and turning to old Vaal, he shouted after him: "And you say the men should sell to the Merican themselves. Do not the people get help from me? Why, if they trade with the Merican themselves he will cheat them. But he cannot cheat me."

"The Merican is an old friend of yours," returned the old man.

Shouldering the chunks of meat the men joyfully went off with them to their yarangs. Everybody was in a happy mood. No wonder! Meat from the first spoil! And the hunting season had only just begun.

The boats approached the shore.

"Stop!" suddenly shouted Alitet. "Never mind the meat now—come and help the boats in."

The men obediently dropped the meat and ran towards Alitet. He was "the lord of the land"—the master of the settlement, and the people were accustomed to obey him without demur. Alitet's power and prestige were known up and down the coast and even in the depths of the tundra where dwelt the nomad reindeer herders, the Chauchu.

The boats, with sails made of old sackcloth, had approached the shore. One boat was submerged in the

water up to the gunwale. Six inflated seal bladders flapped on the water like the paws of some fabulous beast, keeping the boat afloat. The fur-clad hunters sat waist-deep in the waterlogged boat. They calmly and sedulously plied their oars to keep themselves warm and prevent the craft from being cast ashore until the line was thrown. Four boys stood on the beach ready to catch the coil.

Vaamcho, the son of old Vaal, threw the line three times, but it fell short of the shore. Wet Vaamcho stood up in the boat, knee-deep in the water. The sea gurgled beneath the soft bottom of the skin boat. Old Vaal began to take his boots off. Just then Vaamcho jumped onto the gunwale and flung in the line.

The old man bided his time, then shouted again:

"To-o-hok!"

The boat was beached. The hunters, all dripping wet, jumped out of it. The water streamed out through a hole in its bottom and the air bladders hung limp from its sides.

"The walrus skin is old," said old Vaal with a sigh. "It should have been changed this summer, but there were no skins."

Soon the boats were all ashore. They were empty. They had brought in one seal between them. The killing season had begun inauspiciously for the boat hunters.

"We would not taste fresh meat if not for Alitet," said Tumatuge.

CHAPTER TWO

Narginaut, a large woman tattooed all over her face, busied herself untying the wet thongs of her husband's torbazes. Alitet lay on his back, studying his wife in silence.

Narginaut took off his torbazes and fur stockings, drew off the top pair of sealskin trousers that tightly

encased his legs and thrust them behind the ceiling beam to dry.

Alitet, half-naked, clad only in thin underpants of reindeer calfskin with the hair inside, squatted on a downy reindeer pelt. His broad chest, powerful neck and muscular arms testified to his extraordinary physique. Indeed, there was not a man on the whole coast who could get the better of him in a wrestling bout. Alitet was fond of wrestling and often made men accept his challenge by force. There were men on the coast who had been maimed by him. And now, sitting in the polog,* he stroked his powerful muscles, as though preparing for a coming bout.

Alitet's fur polog was spacious. Three burners** supplied plenty of light and warmth. Over the burners hung kettles and a pot of fresh walrus meat. Suspended from the rafters were various charms of sea beasts, fish and miniature human figures. One charm was so black with age that it was difficult to say what it was—dog, fox, wolf or bear.

The charms safeguarded the yarang against evils and calamities.

On a wooden box by the front wall stood a shining nickel alarm clock of American make. Judging by the time it registered, it, too, did duty as a charm, fostering good trade relations with the American.

On a pile of reindeer skins, next to the burners, sat the stark-naked flabby figure of the ancient Korauge, the shaman, Alitet's father. A long straggling beard the colour of ash lay on his sunken, creased chest. A fine rein-

* A section of the yarang partitioned off with reindeer skins, usually six by twelve metres in size and the height of a man, which serves as living quarters for the Chukchi family.—*Trans.*

** Here a wooden or steatite bowl filled with blubber, the flame of which, the wick being of moss, serves as fire and light.—*Trans.*

deer calfskin lay on his skinny knees, as though stretched on two sticks. Shaman Korauge was repairing a drum, to the rim of which he was fastening the dried bladder of a walrus.

"Yester eve I beat the drum a very long time. My arms got tired and the drum broke. But I turned away the wrath of the spirits," said Korauge in a quavery voice. "That is why you fell in with so many walruses."



"What you say is true, father. You lured the walruses to my boat," confirmed Alitet.

Flattered by the admission, Korauge sniggered through his closed mouth, picked up a little whalebone rod and scratched his back with it, grunting with sensual delight. Then he passed the rod to his grandson and said:

"Here, get you busy with my back, Goi-Goi, while I listen to Alitet."

The boy fell to with a hearty good will.

Lying prone on the skins like a walrus on the ice, with his hands folded under his head, Alitet narrated at length the story of his hunt. When he had finished Korauge observed:

"There, you see, I am endowed with a great power. The power of the spirit. I can command the sea beasts."

"Father, I shall tell the hunters of your power. Let them know it!"

Narginaut placed a large wooden bowl containing walrus meat in the middle of the floor. Steam rose from the meat and the smell teased the appetite. The household moved up to the food. Narginaut deftly cut up the tough meat and whale blubber of the previous year's stocks. Bending over the bowl she slashed off thin, hard slices of whale blubber. Alitet snatched them from under the knife and swallowed them without chewing.

Now and then Narginaut would swiftly throw a piece into her own mouth and resume her manipulations with the knife.

The neighbour Tumatuge crawled into the yarang. He hastily shed his parka, rolled it up into a bundle and squatted down on it. He attacked the food without waiting for an invitation.

Following the snack of whale blubber everyone fell greedily upon the walrus meat. It was fresh and savoury meat of the first killing. Digging their teeth into the tough meat the eaters cut off pieces close to their lips with a sharp knife and swallowed them. The only sounds in the yarang were a loud munching and the clatter of the hostess' knife on the wooden bowl.

After the meal everyone licked his greasy fingers and wiped his mouth with dried grass.

"Now give us tea," said Alitet to his wife. "With sugar. Let Tumatuge drink tea like a real man. He shot well at the walruses. He killed nine of them out of eleven."

Tumatuge smiled, passed his hand over his perspiring face, and, addressing himself to Korauge, began his narration:

"We went far out to sea. We rowed all day without resting—there was no wind. There were many walruses there."

"I drew them thither by the beatings of my drum," the shaman broke in.

"Yes, you speak truly, Korauge, there was a lot of walruses. The boat hunters did not reach that spot. They only came across one. When they killed the walrus and laid the meat in the boat the bottom burst from the weight. We passed them at the time but did not stop to help. We saw them hasten to throw the killed walrus back into the sea."

"Help is taboo. The wrath of the spirits might have been turned against the whaleboat. The spirits are all-powerful and the ordinary mortal is impotent against them, as the tundra mouse is impotent against the wolf. You have acted rightly," admonished the shaman.

"My aim was very good this time," Tumatuge went on excitedly. "As soon as the walrus showed its head the bullet from my rifle hit it where I sent it."

"And whose rifle is it?" broke in Alitet. "Did you not get the rifle from me? There is not another rifle like it on the coast. It is a Winchester—the very best. So Charlie told me. I paid him eight white foxes, three red fox skins and twenty young reindeer skins for it."

"There were ten young reindeer skins, Alitet. I put them on the sledge myself," rejoined Tumatuge timidly.

"No, twenty," said Alitet sternly.

"I must be bad at counting, Alitet. But then I am no trader. How am I to know?" faltered Tumatuge.

"I threw in twenty young reindeer skins extra. Charlie told me that rifle is called 'savage' and it never misses."

The huge copper kettle was empty by now. Korauge the shaman heard out the hunters' stories attentively and said:

"O! I am a big shaman. I have been of great service to my people. I am on good terms with the spirits. The whole settlement lives under my protection. I heal reindeer, I heal men, I drive away the evil spirits from our settlement. Of all men Vaal alone does not want to know this. He is a trashy old man. Yet in luring the walrus to our shores I take care of him, too. Alitet always gives a piece of meat to his yarang as well."

"True, true, Korauge! Each yarang needs three walruses for the winter. But can they kill three walruses each in their leaky boats? They cannot. Alitet helps everybody," said Tumatuge ingratiatingly.

"Yesterday, when I beat my drum, the spirits told me: 'There will be walruses.' I heard that as plainly as I hear the dogs howling in the night. And I said to Alitet: make ready the whaleboat, get ready the men. And so you went forth. And you killed eleven walruses in one day."

Sitting open-mouthed, with his head resting on his knees, Tumatuge threw awed glances at Korauge. Never had his faith in the shaman's miraculous powers been so strong.

Narginaut went outside. She set about dressing the walrus skins. They had a thick layer of fat on them, and that fat had to be removed at once. The skins were those of big beasts and Alitet would no doubt want to sell them to the Chauchu nomads.

Narginaut was worn out from her numerous domestic tasks. At times she wondered: "Why must they kill so many walruses? We do not need so much food." Neither could she understand when Alitet said: "The more skins in the yarang, the more lively spirit there is in a man."

Narginaut's aching arms had barely had time to rest when she had to begin scraping these huge skins again. And tomorrow Alitet would bring more.

"Work, work!" Alitet would say to her. "Do the women in other yarang drink tea with sugar? But you do. Because you live in my yarang. I, Alitet, am just the same as the Merican. So Charlie told me."

CHAPTER THREE

Winter. Twenty-four hours of night. The moon had not yet been born. All was blackness. The sun never made its appearance at this time of the year, and men thought that the sun moved somewhere beneath the earth.

beneath the ocean. And it would not be coming back soon.

There was a raging blizzard. The yarangs creaked and shivered. The blizzard ran riot, shrieking and roaring like a wounded beast.

The dogs dozed, curled up with their muzzles hidden under their bellies, and did not seem to be taking the slightest notice of the wild elements.

In the yarang of old man Vaal the stock of blubber had run out. The dry moss in the burner burnt low and smoked. Inside the polog it was dark and cold. Its inhabitants huddled under shabby old skins, munching the remains of frozen raw seal flesh.

Here, too, in a corner lay Chegít, the favourite dog. Chegít twitched his tail and watched the people crunching meat through his half-closed eyes.

Old Vaal threw him a small piece. Chegít leapt to his feet and hungrily bolted it. He opened his eyes wide and gazed at the old man in expectation of another piece.

Vaamcho, who was gnawing a bone, glanced at Chegít out of the corner of his eye. He felt sorry for the hungry dog. He turned the bone about in his hand, then, after a little reflection, flung it to Chegít.

The dog caught the bone in mid-air and retired with it into a corner, whence there soon proceeded the sound of crunching.

Old Ilineut, Vaamcho's mother, removed the wooden bowl and lit her pipe. She held the big wooden pipe in her shrivelled hand, gazing impassively at the flame with faded eyes. When she had smoked herself dizzy she passed the pipe to her son who lay stretched out on the skins. Vaamcho got up and finished the pipe, squatting on his haunches.

The silence was broken by old Ilineut:

"It is bad without fat. Go to Alitet, Vaamcho. He

gives everybody. The blizzard will last a long time. And you cannot go hunting in a blizzard."

Old Vaal cleared his throat and began slowly, reluctantly as it were, to clean out the pipe. He filled it in silence, and, without looking at his son, said in a husky voice:

"A wife is a source of bother. Go, Vaamcho. Give him the white fox. The sight of a fox skin always puts him in a good humour. The fluffy fur of the little beast tickles his nostrils. Maybe we shall trap some more."

The old man sighed and added:

"The fox skins should really be saved up to buy a rifle with. Without a good rifle a hunter is not a man. But what can you do? A rifle is of no use to an enfeebled man. Without light and warmth a man is like a seal without air."

"The marrow dries in the bones—there is no food," said Ilineut.

Old Vaal pulled at the pipe, blew out a cloud of smoke and, clearing his throat once more, went on:

"I have been silent for many winters. I have kept my tongue in a leash. Now my tongue is eager to speak. It no longer listens to reason."

"Speak, father. Tell your son," said Vaamcho, putting on his torbazes.

Vaal was silent, making up his mind. At length he lowered his head, and, without looking at anybody, began in a low voice:

"It was a long time ago. Unhappy were my eyes then. They saw Alitet collecting white foxes from other men's traps. That is very, very bad! It is uncustomary among our people. My eyes felt sick. Wild words struggled in my throat, but I . . . I said nothing then. It was easier to say nothing than to speak." The old man's voice had dropped to a whisper. "I hid myself behind a mound, so that Alitet should not see me. I was ashamed that my

eyes had seen this. And soon afterwards, Korauge, too, deceived all the hunters of the settlement. The red and white fox skins that had been brought to him as sacrifices were discovered in Alitet's possession. I recognized my white fox and those of other hunters when Alitet exchanged them for Charlie's whaleboat. The little black nose of the fox was clipped as only I clip it. That was my fox skin! I would know it among the multitude of fox skins in the warehouse of Charlie Red Nose. Our fox skins went to pay for the whaleboat. Now the whaleboat has become Alitet's helpmate, and we must carry our skins to him again. So that is the news," said the old man, his head shaking tremulously. "But it is all the same, Vaamcho. Go to Alitet. Ask him for walrus fat and meat with which he feeds his dogs."

Vaamcho tore off his torbazes and said sharply:

"No, father! I shall not go to him. My legs will not take me. I will better dress myself now and go out in the blizzard, among the ice packs, to lie in wait for a seal."

Vaamcho's black eyes blazed.

"Vaamcho," the old man said gently, "in a gale like this there are no seals. Have you forgotten? Your young blood runs hotly even in the cold. But Ilineut is freezing. Go, Vaamcho! Forget what I have told you about Alitet. Do not remember evil. And beware of Korauge the shaman. You have a long time to live. They do not like us as it is. We should not rouse their anger too often."

Vaamcho began putting his boots on in silence.

The old man swallowed some smoke and continued:

"And the Tangs* with their fire guns have scared away the game. The seal rookeries are dying out. Now less and less game comes ashore. Before the walruses used to sleep soundly on the beach. We walked on their backs and they did not hear our footfalls. We speared

* White men.—*Trans.*

only the old bulls. And now the quarry is killed at random. How much meat Alitet has thrown into the sea during the summer! Charlie Red Nose needs only the tusks. But tusks are not food." The old man took a puff at his pipe. "In my young days I was skilful at spearing walruses—struck straight in the heart!" and Vaal brandished his pipe like a harpoon.

The shadow of a smile crossed his deeply furrowed face for a fleeting instant. During the summer Alitet had brought in from the sea over sixty walruses. And how many had been thrown overboard!

The blizzard had lashed itself into a frenzy. There could be no question of going out to hunt the seal. Many of the hunters had visited Alitet these days. To each Alitet gave a chunk of meat and some blubber. He held that men should not be allowed to die of starvation. Men should be helped. He could not do without them.

Vaamcho, too, returned from him with meat and fat.

Replenished with fat the moss burnt up in a broad tongue of flame that lit up the dark chill polog. Life returned to the yarang. How pleasant a warm light dwelling is! Ilincut brightened up and became busy. Soon the water was on the boil. The old woman poured out hot tea for everyone. But Vaamcho stared gloomily at the burner from which the heat emanated.

"Why is there sorrow in your eyes, Vaamcho? See, we have fire now," said Ilincut.

"Alitet asked me for my dog Chegit. His words seared my heart. I said—no. Am I not a hunter too? He was angry. And I have heard some more news, father," said Vaamcho with great emotion. "Do you remember, father, I set traps for white foxes by the Three Hills? It is a very good spot. I took down a lot of bait. But I never caught a single fox. The bait lay untouched. It gave off a bad smell. How came there such a bad smell in the tundra—I could not understand. But just now, when

Narginaut was giving me fat and meat, she dropped a bottle. The bottle broke. Stinking water poured out of it. Here, smell it, father, some of it got on my hands."

Vaamcho held his hand out to his father's nose, and the old man averted his head with a grimace of disgust.

"That is Tang lamp fat.* Charlie Red Nose pours it into his iron lamp. Can it be that Alitet had poured this evil-smelling fat over our bait?" queried the old man in astonishment. "If so, he is an utterly bad man."

"It is the same smell. One cannot mistake that evil smell," said Vaamcho.

The old man heaved a sigh.

This masculine conversation passed the woman's ears unnoticed. Ilineut was busy with her own affairs. She picked up the slop tub to carry it out. But she had barely opened the outer door when a fierce gust of wind tore the tub out of her hands and sent it rolling away from the yarang. The old woman ran after it and was lost in the darkness.

Ilineut did not come back to the yarang. The wind howled and tore at the roof. It seemed to lift the whole snow layer off the ground, whirling it into the air and sweeping it off seawards with a din and roar. The boat, which was securely lashed to its stakes, was wrenched from its moorings.

CHAPTER FOUR

Alitet, after a hearty breakfast, was lying on a bed of downy reindeer skins. His son, Goi-Goi, sat astride his bare belly. The boy was laughing merrily, throwing occasional glances at his mother. Narginaut was pouring out a strong and fragrant brew of Lipton's tea. It was

* Kerosene.—*Trans.*

stuff in the polog. The dark, naked bodies glistened in the bright light of three burners like the glossy skins of walruses.

Korauge the shaman sat dozing. Striving to keep awake in anticipation of tea, he would suddenly start out of his nap, then drop off again into a nodding drowsiness.

"Charlie runs very, very fast . . . Charlie is the lead dog," Alitet was telling his son about his sledge dog.

Alitet was very fond of that intelligent hound and had named him after Mr. Thompson out of a sincere regard for his friend the Merican.

"No one has a dog like that. No one but me."

Alitet blew out his belly and rose on his elbows. Goi-Goi tumbled off onto the skins, and, laughing, scrambled like a bear cub back onto his father.

The head of Tumatuge's wife was thrust into the polog.

"You have come?" Narginaut greeted her.

"Yes," answered the woman. "All our fat has run out. Tumatuge is lying ill, and it is cold in the yarang."

"Father, you must invoke the healing spirits. We must help Tumatuge. He is the best hunter," said Alitet, but the shaman was fast asleep.

"Narginaut, give her a piece. Let her have light, so that she may sew torbazes and slippers. When the second moon comes I shall journey to the nomad herders and the Merican," said Alitet, moving up to the steaming tea together with the skin on which he sat. "Only you must sew good slippers. The Merican himself is going to wear them."

The woman nodded her head violently by way of assent and disappeared in the wake of Narginaut.

Shaman Korauge awoke and also drew up to the little table.

"How many people I feed!" exclaimed Alitet.

"Very many," confirmed Korauge hoarsely. He rubbed his eyes with a deerskin and asked for tea. "You, Alitet, are too generous with your help. You must husband your stocks. There is a shortage of meat on the coast. Stocks are a great power."

A sudden violent gust of wind shook the tent. Everybody looked up startled.

"A very big, strong storm. I must ask the spirits to stop it," said the shaman with a glance at his drum. "Let men go out to hunt. They have become greedy from idleness. They will devour all your stores."

Narginaut came in.

"Give them a little at a time," ordered Alitet. "Let them ask more often. That is what I think. That is what Charlie told me. And Vaamcho—not a piece more. Let him come to his senses. Even if he wants to give me the dog now I will not take it. The man is mad! What does he want with one good dog? It is only having a hard time among those trashy mongrels of his."

"You have forty-three dogs, Alitet. What do you want Vaamcho's dog for? He has so very few," said Narginaut and quailed at her own temerity.

"What is that my ears hear?!" hissed the shaman. "Or have you become a teamster that you speak of dogs? Or has your tongue learnt to discuss the affairs of men?"

"A lot of feed is needed for the dogs," murmured Narginaut.

"Feed is not the care of your hands. All the same meat goes on the side. Or are you tired of feeding my dogs? Eh?" snarled Alitet. "Every woman looks with envy upon the fullness of your work. Tell me, father, if your mind agrees, do I speak rightly or do I not?"

"You are the son of Korauge. You always speak rightly."

Pleased with the compliment, Alitet smiled. He stroked the muscles of his arm, then suddenly demanded:

"Why should I not take myself one more wife?"

"He cannot take a second wife who is unable to provide one with food. You can feed many wives and all their children. You are no weakling. You feed four dog-teams!" proudly quoth the shaman, waving his skinny arm.

Alitet eyed his wife triumphantly.

"Eh? Narginaut? Is that clear?"

"Your mind," she answered meekly.

"You have grown clumsy in your old age. You do not manage to look after the household."

And Alitet spoke a long time with his father about the ways and means of multiplying his riches, about buying a herd of reindeer and about his trading with the nomads and the Mericans.

In the evening, when all were preparing for sleep, the drum started throbbing and twanging. The shaman chanted:

"My people have not left their yarangs for many days. . . .

"My people must go out after the seal. . . .

"Alitet is tired from helping them. . . .

"Wind, go away! . . .

"Korauge himself asks it. . . ."

"Guit, guit! Kaiva, kaiva!" ejaculated Alitet, encouraging the shaman.

Korauge beat his drum in a frenzy and screeched hysterically, appealing to the spirits.

The north wind subsided. It sped into the hills, deep into the Chukotsk range, but the loud cracking noises of the pack ice could still be heard out at sea.

The hunters crawled out of their stuffy pologs and clustered around the yarang of Vaal.

"She went out with the tub and . . . did not come back," the old man was saying, spreading his hands. "We searched in the night."

The old woman was found in the morning among the pack ice, at the very edge of the cliff. She sat against an ice block, with her head between her knees. Vaamcho touched her on the shoulder, and the frozen body toppled over.

Nearby, within ten paces, the rim of the tub peeped out from under the snow.

CHAPTER FIVE

The fiery red orb of the moon crept out from behind the mountain ridge and mounted swiftly into the sky. At times it was overcast, and then the stars shone out more brightly.

A deep stillness reigned. Only from the tundra were there occasionally borne the sounds of passing reindeer herds. They moved swiftly, and the cries of the herds-men were drowned in the clicking of hooves. The herds passed westwards into the Rylkaliaut tundra, and a deep and solemn silence descended on the world once more.

The moon rose high. Its bright light made seal hunting and fox trapping possible, and the renewal of intercourse with the people of the neighbouring settlements. The yarangs of the Enmakai settlement loomed sombrely in the eerie moonlight. Outside the largest yarang, belonging to Alitet, on the edge of the settlement, stood a crowd of young hunters. Despite the terrific frost they were all bareheaded. Their hair, covered with hoarfrost, gleamed like silver. Their swarthy faces were nipped red. They had gathered to see Alitet off. His booming voice sounded from behind the polog:

"Tumatu-uge!"

"Vo-ooi!" responded Tumatuge and, despite his illness, he rushed forward with alacrity to answer the call.

If Alitet had commanded him to jump off the cliff Tumatuge would have complied without hesitation.

"Harness Charlie in front, and Kaper in the shaft!"

"E-heil!" responded Tumatuge swiftly and made for the sledge lying on the trestles.

The young men ran up to assist him. It was a splendid sledge, made of Kolyma birchwood by the finest craftsmen. The sledge was painted a bright green. There was not a single nail or bolt in it. Everything was lashed together with good strong leather thongs. That is why it lay on trestles, beyond the reach of hungry dogs, who might chew the straps. Everything in Alitet's household had its proper place. Alitet liked things shipshape.

The sledge stood ready at the entrance to the yarang. Tumatuge unwound a long walrus hide strap—the traces—furnished with loops at intervals of two arms' length. To these loops the dogs were hitched in pairs. Charlie ran towards the sledge, dragging Tumatuge after him. The huge grey dog, resembling a husky wolf, was eager to get into harness. Tumatuge gripped the dog by the breech band and it was all he could do to keep up with its headlong rush.

Charlie ran to the end of the stretched traces, came to a stop of his own accord and sat down on his haunches. His long red tongue lolled and his eyes blazed with excitement.

The other lads led up the rest of the team. The dogs, healthy and well-fed, were all eager to get into harness and take a run. Charlie lay down in the snow and, turning over on his back, began to roll himself about, kicking his legs in the air. All the other dogs simultaneously followed suit.

Tumatuge ran to the polog.

"Alitet!" he cried. "The dogs are tumbling in the snow. There will be a blizzard."

"Never mind," growled Alitet.

He leisurely finished off his last mug of tea. No sooner did he make his appearance than the dogs leapt to their feet, eager to be off. Charlie howled.

Alitet responded to the lads' greetings, carefully inspected the harness and, with a look of displeasure, adjusted the traces of three of the dogs.

"Belly band!" he shouted to his wife.

Narginaut ran into the yarang and brought out a small reindeer skin with strings at the ends.

"Charlie's fur is thin on the flanks, he may freeze them. I'll have to wrap him up on the way," said Alitet.

The dogs keenly watched his every movement.

Alitet turned the sledge over, runners up.

"They are rough. Need icing!"

Tumatuge's countenance fell and he felt a twinge of guilt. "How had he overlooked icing the runners?" He dashed precipitately into the yarang and instantly reappeared with a kettle of water. Hastily wetting a bit of bearskin he applied it to the runners. A thin coating of ice formed on the sledge runners.

Alitet examined it and said:

"Too thick. It will break off going over the bumps."

Tumatuge pulled out his knife and swiftly scraped off the ice crust clean to the wood.

Alitet took the piece of bearskin and ran the length of the overturned sledge, applying the skin to the runners as he did so.

"That's the way to do it!"

Tumatuge emptied the contents of the kettle into a bottle and gave it to Alitet.

Thrusting the bottle under his parka Alitet sat down on the sledge. The dogs quivered.

"Ehei!" cried Alitet, and the team wrenched the sledge and dashed off down the hillside.

The lads gazed with envy at the swiftly retreating dog-team of Alitet.

And there was something to look at! It was well worth the risk of a frostbitten ear.

Alitet bought his dogs from the Kolyma team drivers and paid eight and more white fox skins for each. There was not a better dog-team on the whole coast. No one except Alitet could afford such dogs. He conducted trade with the nomads and every year he brought them walrus skins, leather thongs and footwear, of which the herdsmen needed a lot. He brought them merchandise from Mr. Thompson's trading post and carried out of the tundra every year large quantities of fox skins.

Whenever a hunter reared a good dog it was bound to find its way to Alitet. There was no way of avoiding yielding up a good dog to him—he would take it away in any case. Alitet was fond of husky dogs with a good stride. The dogs had to be of equal size, so that they could follow in each other's tracks. With dogs like these he could brave any blizzard.

The dogs, with uplifted muzzles, sniffed the scent of wild game, and raced on at a spanking rate. Alitet was in a good humour. He always felt in a festive mood when riding out to trade with Charlie.

CHAPTER SIX

Under the hillside, overlooking a steep cliff, stood the Loren settlement with its straggling yarangs. Some of the yarangs were big, dome-shaped canvas-covered dwellings, others were quite small with roofs made of walrus skins. On the edge of this straggling settlement stood cone-shaped yarangs patched up with sacks, old walrus skins and bits of sealskin. Here dwelt the hunters who never knew the faint languor and pleasant drowsiness that comes of having had enough to eat.

There was a scarcity of good pelts. After each walrus hunt the hunters gave up the pelts to the master, the man who owned the boat. Some of the skins together with the meat went for food. No clothes could keep a man warm in winter unless he had walrus meat in his belly.

The cliff fell away to a low stretch of beach, covered with pebbles and snow. Here, close by the seashore, and standing apart from the yarangs, was a building of a rather unusual type in this part of the country. Its roof and walls were of corrugated iron sheeting. This iron house belonged to Charles Thompson.

Charlie, as Mr. Thompson bade the natives call him, had lived here for over twenty years without a break. An odd vagary of fate had cast his life on these remote and alien shores. When still a young man he had murdered his wife and fled his native Norway seeking refuge from justice in America. Roaming from country to country he had eventually made his way to Alaska. In America he had changed his name to Charles Thompson and adopted American citizenship.

In Alaska the gold rush had turned his head, as it had those of many others. But wherever he happened to be he was haunted by the constant fear of discovery. In America the extradition law was in effect for criminals.

A fugitive from the laws of the white man, Charles Thompson crossed the Bering Strait into the unfrequented latitudes of the Chukotsk Peninsula, which rumour credited with no less gold than there was in Alaska.

When Charles Thompson first set foot on Chukotsk shores his entire belongings consisted of a pickaxe and the few pocket instruments that comprised the usual equipment of gold prospectors. Charles Thompson knew only too well that gold would enable him to fight any laws.

But digging and panning out ore alone in the cold and deserted tundras was no light task. The life of the

lone gold prospector was fraught with great risk. Tomorrow a devilish run of luck might make him a millionaire, or he might die of starvation like a solitary beast.

He had not been in Loren for long, however, when he made a very important discovery which radically changed the whole pattern of his future life. He saw gold pouring into the hands of smugglers in the form of expensive furs with practically no effort on their part. There was no doubt in his mind as to the lucrative prospects of this honourable pursuit.

The smugglers offered him to act as their agent. On the basis of a simple gentleman's agreement, without paying a single cent, he received from them a considerable cargo of goods. Mr. Thompson shortly married a Chukchi woman and settled down to the life of a trader at Loren.

The following summer the smuggler schooner failed to show up. Rumours said that she had struck a reef and gone down with the whole of the honourable crew with whom Mr. Thompson had made his verbal agreement.

After this bit of good luck Mr. Thompson became the possessor of a private account with a Washington banking house. His first substantial deposit from the proceeds of his fur deals was to remain one of the most thrilling memories of his life.

Many years had since passed, and the pickaxe with which he had arrived on Chukotsk now lay on a shelf in his store as a talisman that had brought Mr. Thompson to this El Dorado.

Charles Thompson was by now a man of no little affluence. He no longer dealt with smugglers, but was connected, on his own showing, with "a real respectable firm."

Every summer a schooner came to him from America with a cargo of goods. The hunters worked day and night for several days in succession hauling the cargo

ashore. The cases and bales lay for a long time on the shore unguarded, yet not a single brick of tea, not a single piece of sugar or plug of tobacco would ever be missing. Here on these shores dwelt an amazingly honest people. Despite their dire poverty and great need the idea of stealing anything from Charlie never entered anyone's mind. And when the schooner left, the cargo was carried into the warehouse, not for the sake of getting it under lock and key, but merely to protect it from the rain, snow and winds.

Every summer the skipper handed Mr. Thompson a bank statement showing that some ten to fifteen thousand dollars had been paid into his account for the previous year's fur proceeds. In the long winter nights, while the blizzard howled outside, Mr. Thompson would study his bank accounts with immense satisfaction. Having gazed his fill he would lock the papers again in his strongbox. His account was big enough to provide him security for the rest of his life on the interest alone. Mr. Thompson was beginning to think of leaving this country, but the desire to scrape together another ten thousand or so dollars induced him to postpone his departure from year to year.

On second thoughts Mr. Thompson would say to himself: "But why should I quit this place? In this country I am a representative of civilization, I enjoy a special privilege as a sort of colonial governor. Go back to the States? Or to Norway? What for? To be lost amid the vast surge of none too happy people? No! I'll stay here another year."

Over a dozen dog sledges stood hitched around Mr. Thompson's iron house. The dogs lay sprawling in relaxed attitudes after the long trail. The hunters were gathered about their sledges exchanging the latest items of news. The centre of interest was a young man named Aye from Yanrakenot. In his sealskin bag lay the pelt



of a rare animal---a silver fox. Aye was cheerful and this made men wonder, for everyone knew that the trapping of such game was an omen of ill luck to the hunter. But Aye was apparently too young to understand that, they thought.

But Aye knew all the omens. He deliberately made no mention of the fact that he had another silver fox in his bag, and the catching of two silver foxes at the same time was, on the contrary, a sign of good luck. And so Aye did not look grieved.

Besides, it was sometimes advisable, when transacting barter business, to act the simpleton, inexperienced in the world and its ways. It would be amusing to see how men pitied you.

The hunters looked forward that day to good trading. Aye was to start it. Charlie would be so delighted by the sight of the rare animal that his red nose would start twitching.

A tall dark-eyed lad with an incipient moustache, Aye wore an air of importance beyond his years. It was not everyone who could bring Charlie Red Nose a silver fox. When Charlie invited the hunters to tea in the little hallway of his iron house before opening business Aye took the most prominent seat.

The hospitable, hearty American never stinted anyone a cup of strong tea with a soda cracker. He even treated the hunters who came down to the trading post out of sheer curiosity to watch other men trading. He had a good eye for business, had Mr. Thompson. And hunters and trappers would often come down from hundreds of miles away to take a cup of tea in his iron house and examine his wares.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mr. Thompson's store was a primitive affair in the matter of fixtures. The walls were of corrugated iron and the shelves were made of rough bulkhead boards. Similar boards resting on two big barrels served as a counter.

Mr. Thompson did not believe in squandering dollars. Sooner or later he would have to leave all this behind.

The shelves were loaded with tobacco, bunting, beads, cartridges, hair combs, thimbles and needles. On the wall hung three sample Winchesters of different calibres—25 by 20, 30 by 30 and 44. These were the only type and calibres of rifle in use among the local hunters.

Mr. Thompson himself sat behind the counter. He was a burly man of about fifty-five with a square jaw and sagging jowls and pouches under his eyes. His pale, clean-shaven face was set off by a big blotchy red nose. Mr. Thompson had the appearance of a good-natured, even-tempered man. There was an air of dignified composure about his substantial figure. His bulkiness was enhanced by a pair of fur trousers and an unbuttoned fur windbreaker, beneath which he wore a heavy woolen shirt of a checked pattern.

Mr. Thompson amiably surveyed the crowd of hunters who thronged around the counter and said:

"So here we are. This is going to be a big day!"

The hunters pushed Aye to the fore. Mr. Thompson's frame of mind was a matter of great concern to them. How would Charlie Red Nose conduct business today? Would he be generous with his wares or not? You could never tell with him.

Aye with an air of unflurried gravity laid out his silver fox.

Mr. Thompson, as was to be expected, got up swiftly and fairly pounced upon it. A pleased smile passed over the faces of the hunters.

Mr. Thompson closely examined the pelt through his horn-rimmed glasses. He stretched the skin to its full length and blew on it. A soft silvery ripple ran up the pelt from tail to ears. There was a look of unconcealed admiration on his face as he puffed loudly on the silky fur. His eyes actually gleamed. The fox was undoubtedly a first-rate specimen.

The hunters watched with bated breath. They knew what they were about when they had let Aye go first. Aye, feeling himself a great trapper, looked on importantly and with an air of utter unconcern. O, this was a great day for Aye too! It was the first time in his life that he had trapped such a fox.

The hunters were all agog with curiosity. Many of them had never trapped such an animal. The silver fox had become a matter of pride for them all.

What would Charlie Red Nose give for it?

Mr. Thompson threw the pelt onto a pile of skins with studied indifference.

"It is a good fox," he said, and with slow deliberation began laying out on the counter an enamelled tea kettle, a knife for dressing skins, a dozen plugs of tobacco, five bricks of tea and four yards of bunting.

The hunters jostled one another round the counter to obtain a better view of these riches. Aye alone maintained an air of indifference.

Charlie thought wonderingly: "He's not satisfied! What the dickens does that savage need?" and got out in addition some beads, a file, needles, thimbles and a comb.

"Ten articles for one animal, and half of them iron!" he exclaimed, amazed at his own generosity.

"Ai, what a lot!" clamoured the hunters on all sides. "Ai, what a lot!"

The animal was a splendid specimen, it is true, but no one expected Charlie to offer such an abundance in

exchange. They knew perfectly well that when Charlie was in a bad mood he was liable to forget what a hunter most needed. At such times the hunters would resort to cunning and steal a march on Charlie by concealing from him the fact that they had more pelts in their bags. They would carry them back for a hundred miles or more, figuring to come down with them another time.

Mr. Thompson was acquainted with all these artifices and did not let them bother him. What difference did it make whether he cleared up all the furs now or a little later? What did matter was that the furs should be available for the arrival of the schooner.

Today the hunters had decided to trade all they had, for Charlie was in a good humour. They crowded around the counter, each awaiting his turn.

Aye stood silently before his ten articles, and instead of putting them away into his bag, he stood leisurely filling his pipe with a mixture of tobacco and wood chaff. Then, lighting up, he raised his head and said:

"Charlie, I do not need the things you have put out here."

The hunters were thunderstruck.

"What? You do not want these--this here real American tobacco instead of that rubbish you are smoking?"

"I want a rifle."

"The hell you do! You haven't got enough pelts for a rifle. You'll have to throw in at least one white fox if you want a rifle." Mr. Thompson was indignant.

"I will bring you a white fox another time."

"Nothing doing! I have only a few Winchesters left, and they are sold to Alitet. He's taking them into the hills for the nomad reindeer men."

"That's a pity," said Aye calmly. "Give me back the fox."

This unexpected demand left Mr. Thompson speechless. At length he removed his fur cap, revealing bald patches amid reddish hair, wiped them with a red handkerchief, took off his glasses and wiped them too, then said in a lower tone:

"Have you ever seen such a hunter? Where has he learned to trade like this? Has anybody been teaching you to trade like this?"

"Yes."

"Who?" Mr. Thompson snapped.

Aye was silent. He stood shuffling his feet uneasily.

"Well, why don't you speak?"

"Charlie," Aye began. "You know our old man Kamenvat. He has a daughter named Tygrena. She has been plighted to me. That is why I always consult this old man. It was he who told me of the place where the silver foxes could be found. I went there and for six days I kept watch over my trap. For six days I lived in the snow. And while I was away a Russian man spent the night in our settlement. His name was Partisan."

Mr. Thompson looked up sharply. He had read about the Russian revolution in the newspapers and had heard that there had been frequent changes of whiteguard rulers on Kamchatka—with Kolchak in power one day and Kappel the next—and that Soviet partisans were operating in the mountains of Kamchatka. The fact that a partisan had turned up on the Chukotsk coast came as a shock to him.

"This Partisan (Aye supposed this to be the Russian's name) sat up all night talking to our old man. Tygrena listened too. She told me that the Russian had spoken about a new law of life, a new law of trade. So she said. And when I sat on the sledge, before setting out to come down here, she ran up to me and said: 'Aye, try to trade with Charlie the way Partisan said! Choose yourself

what you want to barter your fox skin for. Ask for a rifle.' That is how it was, Charlie. . . ."

"Ha! ha! ha! Since when have women begun to teach men how to trade? Shame! Just look at this hunter!"

"Tygrena is a good hunter herself. She knows how to handle a rifle as well as a man and is an excellent shot," answered Aye proudly.

"Very well," muttered Mr. Thompson with a sneer. "Take your fox. I can see it rotting in your yarang and you getting nothing for it."

And as Charlie Red Nose bent down to get the fox, Aye, too, said with a little smile:

"It will not rot. I shall take it to Pete."

"To Pete Brukhanov?"

Mr. Thompson, still holding the pelt in his hand, said angrily:

"The man is mad, he has lost his senses entirely! Why, you head of a seal, do you not know that Mr. Pete lives five hundred miles from here?"

"That doesn't matter. I don't mind if it does take me twenty days."

"All right, I will give you the rifle, just out of pity for your poor dogs."

And Mr. Thompson took a new Winchester, calibre 25 by 20, off the wall and handed it to Aye.

"It is not a strong rifle," said Aye irresolutely. "It cannot kill anything bigger than a seal. You know yourself, Charlie, what rifles are used for walruses. I want a 30 by 30 rifle."

"A real hunter should not be such a cadger as you are!" growled Mr. Thompson, but fearing lest the lad really take his fox to the Russian merchant, he gave him the rifle he asked for.

The gratified hunter placed the rifle next to his bag and pulled out a second silver fox even more splendid than the first.

"Kakomei!"* the hunters cried in astonishment.

One lad, his eyes round with amazement, ejaculated:

"It is fit to make one burst with surprise!"

"Okay! I see you have turned out to be quite a fine hunter. I suppose you must be on friendly terms with the spirits if they allow you to trap such fine animals?"

"Yes, that is so. I always try to please the spirits," replied Aye.

Mr. Thompson examined the fox skin, and for the first time in twenty years, asked:

"What do you want for this one?"

The hunters gasped. They could scarcely believe their ears. Charlie Red Nose had asked Aye what he wanted! That might be very good or it might be very bad. It was difficult for them to say.

"There are two of us without rifles," said Aye. "We never had good rifles. Give me another one. Give me a rifle for Tygreña."

"You goddam son of a bitch! You are crazy! Why, the first rifle isn't fully paid for, and you are asking for another one! Do you want to incur the wrath of the spirits?"

The hunters scowled at Aye. He seemed to be setting himself out deliberately to spoiling Charlie's temper, and they had not yet begun business with him.

Just then a boy came running in, shouting: "Alitet! Alitet!"

The door was flung open and Alitet strode into the store, dressed in a smart new parka made of marbled young reindeer skins.

"Hullo, Alitet!" cried Mr. Thompson, overjoyed at seeing him.

The hunters quickly cleared a way for Alitet who strode past them towards the counter and held his hand

* An interjection expressing amazement.—*Trans.*



out to Mr. Thompson. Catching sight of Aye he asked mockingly:

"What are you doing here? Come to see how hunters conduct trade?"

"Oh, no, he is a great hunter himself!" said Charlie. "Look at this silver fox I have bought from him. But that is not all. Here is another one."

Alitet's eyes glittered with envy.

"How is it no men knew of your having trapped these foxes?" he asked suspiciously.

"Now they all know," retorted Aye with dignity. "You, too, may look at them."

"Where did you trap them?"

"In the tundra."

"The tundra is as vast as the sea."

Aye said nothing. He remembered what Vaamcho had told him of how Alitet had poured kerosene over his bait, and he was loath to engage with Alitet in hunting talk.

"You are silent? Maybe you caught them in another man's trap?" said Alitet sarcastically.

Aye flushed. The insult was unendurable. What would men think? Aye was sorely tempted there and then to make public what he knew of Alitet's machinations, but Vaamcho had asked him not to breathe a word about it. Controlling himself with an effort Aye said:

"These foxes, Alitet, I caught next to the Three Hills. You know the place, Vaamcho set his bait there too. But I poured Tang lamp fat on my bait. True, the white fox runs away from the evil smell, but the silver fox seems to like the smell. I was not aware of it."

Aye eyed him with a twinkle of malice and paused for him to reply. But Alitet turned swiftly to Thompson and muttered:

"Wasting time on foolish talk is like eating snow—you will not quench your thirst. I would like some tea, Charlie, after my journey."

"Okay!" shouted Mr. Thompson. "We'll shut up shop for a while. I don't mind having a bite myself."

Mr. Thompson cast a last avid glance at the fox skin and threw it onto a pile of furs.

"The trading can wait. Now, all clear the place. You will get your goods later on," he said to Aye.

"Maybe you will take the fox later on as well?" said Aye, getting on the high ropes.

"Goddam!" Mr. Thompson flared up. "Truly, this young man's head differs little from that of the seal! He is afraid that he will not get paid for his fox. Charlie has never yet owed a man anything. On the contrary, nearly every one of you is in debt to me."

"True, true, Charlie!" cried the hunters in chorus. "We are all in debt to you."

The hunters did not understand the meaning of "god-dam," but they all knew that it was a bad omen in the forthcoming deals.

Charlie bent down, picked up the fox skin and threw it in Aye's face. No one was sorry for Aye. Everyone felt that he deserved it.

"Take it back, take it back! Aye can wait!" cried one of the hunters.

It was a flustered Aye who clutched the fox skin in one hand and wiped his perspiring brow in silence with the other hand. He felt ashamed that his conduct had aroused the displeasure of his fellow tribesmen.

Alitet snatched the pelt out of his hand and threw it behind the counter.

"Merkichkin!" he rapped out a Chukchi oath.

"All right," said Aye, yielding. "Let it remain with you."

"Just as you like," said Mr. Thompson, mollified. "Charlie knows how you live. I have always tried to make things easier for you."

The store rapidly emptied out.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Alitet returned home with his sledge laden high with various goods. He was highly pleased with his bargain and promised Charlie to collect a large quantity of furs from the nomad reindeer people. They lived far away in the hills and never came down to the coast. But before setting out on the long trek to the hills Alitet decided to bring home a second wife. The girl he wanted to take was betrothed to Aye from childhood. Alitet knew that. But the sharpened feeling of hostility towards Aye following the incident in Charlie's store had strengthened his resolve to take the girl from him.

He set out for Yanrakenot the following day. In his sledge lay the pelt of a young reindeer, the Chukc marriage token. Old Kamenvat, of course, would not refuse to accept this offering and would gladly give Tygrena away to Alitet. If not, Alitet would take her by force.

The weather was calm and fine, with the moon shining brightly. Alitet rode fast. About midway the dog-team swept out onto the Irgonei plateau. Alitet brought the team to a halt and scanned the ice fields out at sea. Beyond them lay the black strip of the open sea with the sky hanging darkly above it.

On the other side, the mountains towered beneath a bright starry sky. Now and again a shooting star dropped earthwards. Alitet dug the gee pole deeper into the snow and brought out his pipe and tobacco. He sat back in the sledge smoking, then after a while he slowly got up and stepped over to the lead dog.

Charlie wagged his tail and reared on his hind legs, begging for his master's caress. When Alitet came up closer Charlie leapt forward and placed his powerful forepaws on his master's chest, licking his face and nuzzling his head amid the warm folds of his fur gar-

ment. Alitet took the dog's muzzle in his hands and rubbed noses with him, saying:

"Run faster, Charlie! Tygrena is waiting for us in Yanrakenot. The strongest and most beautiful of all girls, the daughter of Kamenvat, the old beggar Kamenvat. When Tygrena comes to my yarang I shall order her to feed you with the choicest morsels of walrus meat."

He patted Charlie's head and stepped over to another dog.

"And you, Wolf Spine, what are you drawing in your foot for? Hurt your paw? Let me see it!"

The husky black dog with bright, expressive eyes rolled over onto its side and held its paw out. The heel was bleeding.

Alitet tied a little fur stocking on the injured foot and went over to Kaper.

The huge old hound sat at the end of the traces next to the sledge. It evinced no great joy at the approach of its master, but wagged its tail with a gleam of cunning in its eye. Alitet had no love for this dog and had long been wanting to get rid of it. Kaper was a hindrance to the team, he did not run well in the traces. That day, too, he had tried Alitet's temper more than once. The cur would have to be taught a lesson.

Alitet suddenly kicked the dog full in the face. The hound sprang to its feet, its tail between its legs, gazing askance at its master. Alitet took hold of its muzzle. Kaper darted back, but was unable to wrench itself free from the man's grip.

"Scared, are you? Soon old Kamenvat will be your master. With that old man, my father-in-law, you may laze about all your life."

Alitet gripped the dog's muzzle with one hand and stroked it with the other. The dog quivered under the unaccustomed caress. Alitet reached out for the gee pole. Kaper leapt aside but the harness held him fast. Alitet

swung the pole. The dog cowered at his feet, whining and covering up its eyes. Alitet struck a swinging blow at its head. In a fit of fury he rained blows on its sides and back. Kaper lay huddled up in the snow, yelping and whimpering.

Suddenly the dog paired with Kaper snarled and sunk its fangs into Alitet's leg, tearing out a piece of the trousers. Alitet sprang back, snatched up his Winchester and shot the dog point-blank.

There was a glimmer of light in the sky. Sandy River* traced a glowing path across the heavens.

"I am a man of the Sun God. All the people of the coast know me. The Chauchu know me. I am a great friend of Charlie, the Merican."

Thus Alitet communed aloud with himself as he gazed at the glowing heavens.

The dogs pricked up their ears at the sound of his voice, and, taking it for a signal to start, they sprang forward, only to be checked by the gee pole which held the sledge fast. The dogs looked back. Alitet drove the pole deeper into the snow and went on with his musings:

"I daresay the people who dwell in the heavens, the people of the Upper World, know me too. Look how brightly the Hare Heap** shines. And over there is Dug-in Stake*** And those stars, sliding down the mountains. . . . There is Limpid Ribs**** And the Giants who make the wind—where are they?"

Long luminous shafts were flung across the sky as far as the North Star like walrus thongs stretched from yarang to yarang. These shafts now extended to Limpid Ribs, now scattered in all directions like a startled herd of reindeer. The sky became alive in a riot of colours

* The Milky Way.—*Trans.*

** Cassiopeia.—*Trans.*

*** The North Star.—*Trans.*

**** Venus —*Trans.*

such as are not met with on earth. Flaming streaks of flickering light spread swiftly across the whole heavens, their shimmering bands crisscrossing from end to end of the firmament. Amid these dazzling streamers of the Aurora Borealis the moon hung pale and envious like an old wife.

Alitet, thrilled and startled, peered up into the sky and thought: "The people of the Upper World are celebrating a great feast. They have lighted many campfires."

But the heavenly fires soon burnt themselves out. They died away in fitful spurts, and once more the moon reigned supreme in a halo of brilliant stars.

Alitet filled his pipe, struck a thick American match against the sledge and lit up.

Further on the trail ran over the icebound sea. Everything around was utterly still. Shooting stars dropped from the heavens. To Alitet it seemed as though the dwellers of the Upper World were throwing disused old burners out of their yarangs.

The team sped over the fantastic chaos of pack ice like some frightened bird, now sweeping up the side of one icy obstacle, now plunging down onto another. Alitet jumped off the sledge and ran alongside, steering its course and helping it over the ice. The sledge would lift its nose, hang suspended, as it were, in mid-air for a brief moment, then swoop down with a crash as it hit the ice. It creaked under the strain but did not break. Alitet's sledge was strongly lashed with sturdy thongs. There was not another sledge like it on the coast, and none of Alitet's tribesmen could ride the way he did.

The ice packs had come to an end, and the team swept into the Yanrakenot settlement with a loud barking. They were greeted by an answering howl from the dogs of the settlement. The sledge drew up outside old Kamenvat's yarang.

Half-dressed people thrust bared heads out of their

yarangs to take a look at the newcomer. Soon Alitet's sledge was surrounded by a crowd of hastily-dressed people. Aye, too, was in the crowd. He was seized with a painful foreboding. On Alitet's sledge lay the reindeer marriage pelt. "Why has Alitet stopped at Kamenvat's yarang? Does he not know that Tygrena is my plighted wife? All the people on the coast know it."

Aye's heart sank and he walked back in silence to his yarang.

Like a bird in the tundra that flits from hummock to hummock, so did the news fly from yarang to yarang.

CHAPTER NINE

Tygrena, tired after the day's hunting, lay stretched on a couch of reindeer skins, fast asleep. Her long black braids tossed on the white pelts looked even blacker by contrast. She smiled in her sleep.

At her side, gazing down at her young face, squatted her old mother. She was loath to wake her. Tygrena opened her eyes and seeing her mother, laughed a soft, almost noiseless laugh, displaying her even white teeth. Her black eyes glowed.

"I had a dream, mother," said Tygrena. "A good dream. I dreamt that Aye and I were living in a yarang of our own. There were a lot of children in the polog, a whole crowd of them. Aye said to me: 'Tygrena, we must enlarge our yarang, we must go to the hills and get skins from the reindeer men.'"

Tygrena sat up and burst into a merry peal of laughter. She broke off at the sound of voices outside.

"What is the noise outside our yarang?"

"Tygrena, Alitet has stopped at our yarang. People say the marriage reindeer skin lies on his sledge. This is a great joy for us."

Tygrena was dumbfounded.

"But what about Aye?" she said. "He is my betrothed from childhood. Their day is drawing near when we shall live together. Or have the people on the coast forgotten this? Have they forgotten our law? Why has Alitet, that old man, brought his deerskin here? He is crafty and greedy! He is a treacherous man! Aye wanted to buy me a rifle for the second silver fox, but Alitet told Charlie Red Nose not to give it to him. I do not want to live in his vile dwelling. Let Aye take that deerskin and throw it into the sea with a weight to it!" Tygrena spoke hotly.

"My daughter, my ears are not accustomed to such speeches. They will bring misfortune upon us," remonstrated the mother with a deep sigh.

Tygrena got up in silence and went over to a corner of the tent. She stood with her back to her mother, lost in thought. Her lithe strong body, hardened by hunting, seemed to be all sinews and muscle.

Kamenvat, her father, had grown old and she had been obliged to go out hunting with the men. But she had come to love the arduous work of men. After a successful hunt she would come home happy and radiant and her merry laughter could be heard ringing throughout the settlement. She was looking forward eagerly to the time when she and Aye would start their own and still happier life together. Now a cold sense of bewilderment and disaster weighted her down. A haze suffused itself over her eyes. Tygrena did not hear what her mother was saying.

"Tygrena, do you hear? We must make tea," her mother repeated. "Take that big kettle there."

Tygrena started, went over to the burner and began stirring the flame in silence. She threw pained glances at her mother who was spreading the best deerskins for the guest's couch.



Outside Kamenvat potted about attending to Alitet's dogs. Now and then he threw an anxious glance towards Aye's yarang. Kamenvat loved Aye as a son, and he knew that Aye's heart must now be beating like that of a reindeer brought to bay by a wolf. But what was one to do? How could one refuse Alitet? Alitet was a rich man, the son of Korauge the great shaman. You could not refuse him!

The old man fumbled with the axe in an effort to chop up the frozen walrus meat. Alitet stood by impressively, leaning against the yarang, waiting to see his dogs fed. One could not entrust such an important matter as the feeding of his dogs to an old man who had never had a good team of his own.

Aye stood outside his yarang, kicking at the hard snow to conceal his agitation. He felt sorry for the old man. Aye always helped him and Tygrena to chop the meat which was frozen as hard as a stone.

"I shall not go and help him now," thought Aye. "Alitet will carry off Tygrena all the same. . . . Perhaps I should help him, though. How difficult it is for him."

On the spur of the moment he ran over to Kamenvat, and with a silent gesture asked for the axe.

Kamenvat straightened his back and his gaze dropped in confusion before that of Aye. The axe fell out of his hand. Aye picked it up and began to chop the meat.

Kamenvat looked sadly at Aye, then pointing towards his yarang he muttered:

"I will go inside. . . ."

Aye quickly chopped up the meat and laid the pieces into a bowl. Alitet said to him:

"That one over there is Charlie. See that he gets a piece with fat on it. Give him two pieces."

Aye picked up the bowl. The dogs sprang to their feet, huddled together with uplifted muzzles and gleaming eyes.

"Charlie!" cried Alitet.

Aye threw a piece of meat which Charlie snapped up in mid-air.

"Utilhen!" cried Alitet, calling another dog.

Utilhen's portion, however, was intercepted by Kaper. Alitet seized the dog by the throat, tore the meat out of its jaws and threw it to Utilhen.

Thus, calling his dogs one by one, Alitet fed them with discrimination, throwing mocking glances in the meantime at Aye.

In the uneventful lives of the coast dwellers every scrap of news was cherished in the memory and everyone knew where a person had died, where a child had been born and who was to marry whom. Alitet knew, too, that Aye was to marry Tygrena. On the day of her birth, amid a winter blizzard, when the newborn infant had been rubbed with snow, the whole settlement knew that Tygrena was designated to be Aye's wife. They grew up together, played together and later went hunting together. They grew fond of each other and looked forward eagerly to the day when they would become man and wife.

Alitet knew that too.

"But when the fox finds a piece of meat in the tundra, does not the wolf take it away from him? In fact, he has no need to take it—the fox will run away himself as soon as the wolf approaches," thought Alitet as he stood watching Aye.

He took the marriage deerskin and went into the yarang. At the entrance to the polog he halted and coughed to make known his presence.

"You have come, Alitet?" sounded the aged voice of Kamenvat.

"Yes, it is I," answered Alitet and proffered the skin of the young deer.

The old man accepted the gift.

Alitet, bending down, swiftly entered the polog. His complacent, grinning face was flushed. Tygreña stood with her back to him braiding her hair. It was light in the polog. Kamenvat sat on a pile of skins with Alitet's marriage offering in his hands.

"A fine pelt," he said with a pathetic smile and handed it to his wife.

The old woman carefully folded the pelt and hung it up in a conspicuous place. Tygreña's fate was sealed.

The daughter placed a little table on short legs in the middle of the polog in utter silence, then, with her face sullenly averted from Alitet, began to pour out the tea.

"Tygreña, why do I see no joy in your face?" her mother asked. "See what an honoured guest has entered our dwelling."

Tygreña did not raise her eyes. One might think that she had not heard her mother's question. For the first time in her life she did not answer her parent.

Alitet looked at Tygreña and said:

"That is nothing. Happiness is a snowflake. A wind blows and it rises. One must wait for a fair wind."

Alitet stripped to the waist and moved up to the table. He drank tea and spoke about the big walrus hunt of the ~~pre~~vious summer and about the heavenly fires that had lighted his way down. And all the time he never once addressed himself to Tygreña.

When Alitet went out to look at his dogs, Kamenvat crawled out of the polog after him.

"My daughter!" said the old woman. "Now you will be a real woman. Your children will not go hungry. Alitet always has plenty of meat. But woe to you if you have no children. Then you will not become a real woman."

Early the next morning Alitet left for the Enmakai settlement with his young wife Tygreña, leaving Kamenvat three dogs.

CHAPTER TEN

A great change had come over Tygrena. She had become gloomy and silent, like a caged fox. She who had been so gay and talkative at home in Yanrakenot was now mute in the yarang of Alitet.

She took up a sealskin, cut out a sole and began listlessly turning up the edges. Presently the work dropped out of her hands.

Tygrena had sewn torbazes since childhood. But at home she had taken a lively interest in her work and had made pretty embroidered designs on the tops with coloured nap. During the long winters she would not manage to make more than a few pairs—for her father, her betrothed and herself. What pleasure each pair of torbazes had afforded! Tygrena's skill was the talk of all the yarangs.

Here in Alitet's home she had to make simple fur shoes for the herdsmen. She had already sewn twenty pairs and there was no end to it. The work heavily taxed her strength.

Alitet was for ever driving her, and as soon as a load of torbazes was ready he would take them along with other goods into the interior of the tundra to the reindeer men.

Narginaut emerged from her polog and sat down beside Tygrena. She began speaking to her in a gentle, motherly voice:

"You are still working, my child. Alitet is so greedy that even if you made two pairs a day he would not be satisfied. The tundra is vast. The people there are many."

"Narginaut, why must he take upon himself to provide the nomad people with boots?" asked Tygrena.

"They have no sealskins there, and the herdsmen run about all the time—they need a lot of boots."

"We also sewed boots for the nomads, but they were our kinsmen. Has Alitet so many kinsmen?"

"No, he barter the torbazes for the pelts of the white fox. All the women of our settlement sew boots for him and still it is not enough for him."

Tygrena, laying aside her sewing, sat listening to the gentle voice of Narginaut. This elderly woman, whom she had at first thought so forbidding, spoke so kindly.

"Did you sew much yourself, Narginaut? I see that your hands are scratched."

"No. In the beginning we lived as all other folks live. I had three children. And I was very happy. Then I lost everything. Alitet fell a prey to a strong malady. Korauge said that the eldest boy was to carry away the disease. Alitet strangled the boy and got well. The girl died the same way. And now I live without a heart. I have no heart, Tygrena." She added in a whisper: "It must have torn loose."

The two women sat on in a long silence.

"And when Alitet made friends with the Merican," went on Narginaut, "he got spoilt entirely. He lost his peace of mind. He rarely stays at home. Always on the move, forever getting himself new dogs, riding about now on one dog-team, now on another. He took more worries upon himself than a person needs in life. And wives, too, he needs not at all for the sake of bearing him children."

The poor woman's words filled Tygrena with dismay.

"Narginaut," she said sadly, "I was plighted from birth to Aye. I am sorry for him. I did not want to come here. Do not be angry with me."

"I know. I feel better with you in the home. You shall be my sister. You will make life easier for me."

She paused, took the sewing out of Tygrena's hands and said:

"Go for a walk, Tygrena, I shall do your sewing for you. Even old Korauge sometimes crawls out of the ya-

rang. Go to Vaamcho. It is jolly there for young people. But try not to let Korauge see you. He does not like Vaamcho."

"I want to go hunting, Narginaut! I want the ice fields, the open spaces! It is the life I love and am accustomed to."

"I shall tell Alitet when he comes home. He will be glad. He has long stopped going out hunting himself, and he demands ever more and more skins. Now Tumatuge is fixing up a third polog. Alitet has decided to bring home a third wife," said Narginaut, and seeing Tygrena's look of astonishment, she added: "Never mind, Tygrena, it will be all the easier for us. You see how much work Alitet has devised."

Outside the wind howled. Alitet was in no hurry to get home. He rode about on his numerous errands and often spent the night with his nevtooms—his friends by wife. It was a custom along the coast for the hunters to arrange between themselves a temporary exchange of wives. Not infrequently one came across Chukchi families the head of which would say: "This is my son, and that is the son of my marriage friend." Such a bond between two families obliged them to render mutual assistance to each other. In the event of the death of a man his family was taken care of by his marriage friend. The male participants in this system of interchangeable marriage were called nevtooms.

But no one took advantage of this ancient custom so much as Alitet. He had such "friends" in practically every settlement.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Life in the Enmakai settlement ran its usual course. As soon as the blizzard died down the hunters went out to the icebound sea. With their hunting guns in sealskin

sheaths slung over their shoulders they went out among the ice fields, seeking the open lanes of water formed amid the wastes of ice through the action of the winds and sea currents.

Before setting out the old men of the settlement would forecast the size and location of these channels by their reflection in the sky. The large patches which resembled great lakes with icebound shores were ill-suited for hunting purposes, since the seal was hard to get at when it had been killed.

Clad in long overalls of a protective colouring the hunters would squat behind the shoulder of a large ice pack, smoking their pipes and keeping a sharp lookout for the seal. The latter rarely showed itself. But when it did, thrusting a bewhiskered head for an instant out of the water, there immediately followed the sharp report of a Winchester. The seal, with a flash of flippers would vanish for a minute beneath the water, then slowly float to the surface, staining the water red with its blood.

In this pursuit Tygrena was fully a match for any of the men of the Enmakai settlement. Seal hunting amid the ice fields she regarded as a welcome diversion after the dreariness of life in Alitet's yarang.

For three days in succession the hunters returned home without their quarry. On the fourth day a strong offshore wind sprang up. To tarry on the ice fields became dangerous. The hunters hastily quitted. All the men returned home, Tygrena amongst them, with the exception of Vaamcho. His absence caused anxiety.

"A very crafty spirit has appeared on the coast. He demands a big sacrifice," pronounced Korauge.

Tygrena thought.

"Alitel has gone to the tundra to visit Echavto, the rich reindeer herder. He will come back, that is certain. But Vaamcho. . . . He went far out into the ice fields on four dogs to find good hunting grounds. I wish it was

Vaamcho who had gone to the tundra and Alitet was seeking good hunting grounds!"

She felt upon herself the keen searching gaze of the shaman. Tygreña wondered how the old man had guessed her wicked thoughts. A sudden feeling of terror gripped her. She got up and went outside.

She could not get Vaamcho out of her thoughts. One was always sorry for a good man. She drew mental pictures of him sitting somewhere amid the ice, seeking refuge from the gale.

"Where shall I go?" Tygreña asked herself.

The wind blew in violent gusts and the yarangs were almost hidden in the blinding blizzard. From the sea came the noise of moving pack ice.

"I shall go to Vaal," decided Tygreña at length.

Eight hunters sat in Vaal's yarang, forming a circle round the old man. An oppressive silence reigned. No one noticed that the burner was smoking. It was clear to everybody that Vaamcho had been carried out to sea on an ice floe. Tygreña stirred the moss in the burner with a little stick. She was afraid to enquire about Vaamcho and squatted down in silence.

Vaal sat with his head bowed. He did not even smoke. Big tears rolled down his furrowed face. Staring at his tear-moistened hand he said in a whisper:

"Never have I seen these... tears. I have become old. I cannot keep them back."

"Where is Vaamcho's other set of clothes?" asked Tygreña in a low voice.

"Out there... in the passage," answered the old man.

The hunters brought in Vaamcho's spare clothes and began making a dummy out of it. They hastily stuffed rags and various household oddments into the parka, the trousers and boots. Soon Vaamcho's clothes took on the form of a human body. All that remained of the old

man's meagre household were two small skins. The rest had gone into the dummy.

"Perhaps you have not stuffed it well enough?" said the old man. "Take these too. I shall not need them, I shall not sleep."

The dummy was carefully carried out into the little passage.

CHAPTER TWELVE

As she was approaching her yarang on her way home Tygrena heard the loud throbbing of the drum.

She halted, but the wind nearly knocked her off her feet. She darted into the passageway and stood listening with thudding pulses to the shaman's howls and the throbbing of his drum.

The creepy sounds seemed to fill the whole yarang, darting like live things from wall to wall and from floor to ceiling. Tygrena pictured the never-smiling face of Korauge.

Something brushed against her feet in the darkness. She trembled in sheer terror. She wanted to rush into the polog, but fear rooted her to the spot. Her feet were leaden. Suddenly Tygrena heard a familiar little whine, and relief swept over her in a swift wave when she realized that it was the old dog that had come to lie down at her feet. She squatted down and pressed the dog's warm muzzle to her breast, stroking it gently.

From inside the yarang came the shaman's wild chant:

*"Cease, O wind!
Alitel has been gone many days.
Spirits, make the weather fine!
Take Vaamcho as a sacrifice..."*

Tygrena, listening with bated breath to the shaman's words, pressed the dog closer and whispered to it:

"It is good for you that you are a dog! It is better to be a dog. I do not want to go inside and meet the old man's eyes again. I wish I could sleep with you out here in the dark, not to see anyone."

The drum continued to throb.

Again the witch doctor's chant reached her from the inner apartment. The words rushed out of his throat in gasping croaks:

"His yarang is the source of misfortune... Ilineut froze to death. Vaamcho ... the spirit..."

The noise of the drum drowned the words.

Presently silence fell in the yarang, broken only by the hoarse gasps of the old shaman. He had worked himself up into a frenzy and gasped like a harpooned walrus.

Tygrena's limbs grew numb and chilled from crouching. She got up cautiously and crept into the polog. She snuffed out the burners and hastily began undressing when she suddenly heard Korauge's hoarse voice:

"Even the beasts do not leave their lairs in such weather. Is it right for you to stray when your husband is absent?"

Tygrena said, without mentioning Vaamcho's name:

"Korauge, a man has been carried out to sea on the ice. The settlement is sunk in grief... A dummy has been prepared, for everyone is anxious to know whether the man is alive. Hark, do you hear the wind?"

"I hear everything, I know everything. Seek not grief there. Anything may happen, Alitet..." The shaman left the sentence unfinished for fear of putting the evil spirits onto his son's trail.

"Who knows, Korauge, what the evil spirits are up to? Were you not about to say that Alitet may have lost his way or fallen over a precipice?"

"Hold your tongue, woman, and go to sleep!" hissed

Korauge. "Your tongue is truly a woman's, it waggles without sense."

Tygrena fervently wished that Alitet would fall off a cliff. After all, accidents like that did happen, and to good men too.

It was an anxious night. The wind swept seawards past the yarangs with unabated fury. The hunters had gathered again in old Vaal's yarang. The tent shook under the fierce impacts of the blizzard. The wind, penetrating through the openings of the passage cover, caused the dummy to stir. Two hunters stood watch over it in constant vigil, and from time to time they cried out to the old man: "It is moving!"

Vaal sat in the polog, and every time these words reached him, a happy smile lit up his careworn grief-stricken face.

It was clear to people that if the dummy moved, that meant that Vaamcho was still alive.

At midday the hunters came running in again with news that the sky was clearing, and they began to cheer up the old man:

"The wind should veer round soon and drive him back to shore."

"The sky is clearing, Vaal. The wind looks like dropping. That is very good for him..."

"We must ask Korauge to make a reverse wind for him."

Not one of the hunters mentioned Vaamcho by name. That had to be kept secret from the evil spirits.

The old man listened attentively to the hunters, gazing at them with sad and thoughtful eyes.

"Make me a pipe. My soul craves for a smoke," he said in a bleak voice.

Tygrena came into the yarang.



"Vaal, the sky is becoming fine. The blizzard will cease and he will come home. I know it ... he is an agile jumper...."

Tygrena sat down by the burner and began refilling it with blubber which she had brought with her.

"It was Narginaut who told me to take some fat. She is an understanding woman."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

On the eve, when Vaamcho, together with the other hunters, had returned empty-handed from the hunting grounds, old Vaal had said:

"The seals are far away now. Out by the distant patches of open sea."

Vaamcho had sat in silence, apparently unmoved. His father was a great hunter and knew what he was talking about. But who would venture so far from the shore among the shifting ice fields?

Hunger stalked the coast. The sole topic of conversation in all the yarangs was seal hunting. Fox trapping had lost its interest for many. Trapping was a good enough pursuit when a man had enough to eat. Pelts were bartered for merchandise. You could live without merchandise, but you couldn't live without food. Vaamcho was determined not to ask Alitet for any more meat. He had decided to try his luck in the distant patches of open water of which his father had spoken.

Early the next morning Vaamcho harnessed his four dogs to a light sledge and rode out to the ice fields.

It was still dark and the yarangs standing on the hillside were quickly lost to view. Vaamcho rode for a long time over the pack ice. Meanwhile the moon had risen, casting a pale radiance on the icy wastes,



and the dogs ran on at a livelier pace. Presently Vaamcho espied from afar a patch of open water.

"That is where the seals are!" he thought, and the thrill of the hunt set his pulses beating.

"Chegit! Pot-pot!" he cried to the lead dog.

Chegit understood what his master wanted and turned right.

The team ran past a huge iceberg. Presently Vaamcho halted the team, climbed up onto an ice pack and surveyed the scene. A strip of calm open sea gleamed in the distance. Not a breath stirred at that early morning hour. A faint mist rose up from the sea. Vaamcho jumped down, resumed his seat in the sledge and, with a shout to the dogs, raced down towards the water.

"This will do," he said to himself. "I will hide behind this hummock. I will get a good view of the seals from here."

He drove the team off a little distance and came back to the edge of the ice. After having made all the necessary preparations he lit his pipe and settled down to wait. But he had hardly returned the tobacco tin to his pocket when a seal made its appearance. It swam out before his gaze like a vision, and Vaamcho's heart pounded with joy. He raised his rifle, but before he could take aim the beast suddenly vanished. Vaamcho stared hard and long at the rippling circles on the surface of the water, but soon they too disappeared.

"There are seals here!" Vaamcho thought, and a pleased smile spread over his face. He lit his pipe again, keeping the rifle ready on his knees.

Another seal came into view in the distance, only to disappear again instantly.

"What can that mean? Does the seal smell tobacco? Or does he scent the dogs? I think he does. There is an offshore breeze," Vaamcho debated with himself.

He went over to the dogs and moved them farther



back, behind and iceberg. Returning to his place he keenly searched the dark patch of water that lay before him. It was visibly growing wider.

A seal sailed majestically down the edge of the ice. It was heading straight for the hunter, its large, black eyes staring at him in curiosity. Its sparse whisker bristled above the water.

Vaamcho pulled the trigger and the inquisitive seal was dead. Vaamcho jumped up, his eyes blazing with excitement.

"I got him!" he cried jubilantly.

Vaamcho whirled his throw stick and threw it out over the seal, but the thong fell short. Vaamcho realized that the quarry was slipping out of his reach. Only now did he notice that the offshore wind had freshened. He walked back from the edge of the ice field and climbed an ice pack whence he looked out towards the land.

"There is a strong wind there, and the sky looks bad," he thought. He decided to turn back at once. He was very loath, however, to abandon the shot seal.

The sea was unruffled. It rose and fell in a gentle swell, which made the water look dense. In this black mass of water, faintly illumined by the moon, floated the carcass of the seal from which Vaamcho could not tear his eyes away.

Vaamcho took the coil of thong in his hand again, tied his belt to it and decided to attempt another throw. But the throw stick again fell short of the body. This time, however, it fell so close that the ripples which it raised in the water set the carcass rocking.

Vaamcho recalled the games he used to play at as a child, when he recovered floating sticks from the water by throwing stones the ripples from which drove the

objects towards the shore. One had only to hit the water on the near side of the object.

Hoping in this manner to drive the seal towards him Vaamcho began repeatedly hurling his throw stick at it. It began to fall quite close to the carcass, and Vaamcho eagerly awaited the moment when it would drop a little beyond. Then with what joy would he drive the prongs into the body and haul in his catch!

Suddenly Vaamcho noticed that the ice on which he stood was moving. He made a dash for the dog-team. A fissure had formed in the ice next to the iceberg and Vaamcho found himself being slowly borne away from the main ice field. The intervening space of water was too wide for even Vaamcho to take at a jump. He rushed from side to side vainly seeking a spot where he could jump across.

"The dogs—the dogs are left on the other side!" thought Vaamcho frantically.

He ran to the edge of the ice facing the spot where he had left the team and gave a loud whistle that awakened the echoes amid the icy wastes.

"Chegit! Chegit! Chegit!" cried Vaamcho.

The dog-team dashed out from behind the ice packs and raced headlong towards their master. The light sledge turned over and was dragged along by the dogs. Upon reaching the edge of the ice the dogs stopped. A wide strip of dark murky water separated them from their master.

"Chegit, come on! Come on, Chegit!" urged Vaamcho, slapping the sides of his skin boots.

Chegit looked at the water, whined, then ran along the edge of the ice, dragging the rest of the team along with him and nosing the ice as he ran.

"Now I am left alone. It is bad to be alone, ai, very bad!" thought Vaamcho. "With the dogs it is good, ai, so good!" He began calling Chegit again.

The lead dog, dragging the others after him, ran down to the edge again, looked over and set up a dismal howl.

"No, they won't go into the water. But they will be cast adrift, too. They won't go home by themselves. Not without me. And then we'll drift on different floes."

Vaamcho's thoughts were all for his dogs, and they seemed to read them, their eyes fixed on their master's face.

"If I'm left alone, I shall live for four days, then shoot myself."

Vaamcho began calling Chegit again in desperation.

The sagacious animal dashed towards the water, gazed helplessly with lowered muzzle at the sheer edge of the ice crevasse and started back.

The call being repeated Chegit, with a great bound, leapt the fissure, but the other dogs had not moved and were dragging Chegit back, with the result that he hung suspended over the edge.

Vaamcho swiftly removed the coil of thong from his belt and adroitly flung his throw stick over the sledge. The prongs caught in the sledge, and Vaamcho began pulling both sledge and team into the water.

What a joy! Now he was no longer alone. Vaamcho quickly unhitched the dogs who instantly began rolling themselves in the snow. Their shaggy fur was covered with icicles. Vaamcho chipped off the icicles from Chegit's skin with his knife handle. The other dogs tore the ice out of their coats with their teeth.

The wind was rising. The moon sank behind the ice packs. Night fell.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Vaamcho lifted the sledge under his armpit and made his way slowly, with the dogs at his heels, towards a big ice pack. This would shelter them from the cold wind.

"Well, Chegit, the wind is getting rough and we must build ourselves a dwelling," said Vaamcho in a perturbed tone, addressing himself to the lead dog.

Vaamcho walked round the ice pack with a business-like air choosing a convenient spot. He started hewing the ice with his knife, digging deeper and deeper, working hard and doggedly, until he had fashioned a rude little shelter for himself and the dogs. Then he dragged the sledge into the ice hut and snuggled in himself with the animals. They would keep each other warm.

Vaamcho wanted to drink, but snow did not quench a man's thirst. He remembered the time when he had been about to cut his moustache off with a knife, but his father had stopped him, saying:

"Why are you cutting off your moustache? A hunter must take care of his moustache as he would of a good dog. It sometimes happens that a hunter goes for a long time without water, and his moustache makes water for him. The rime of fresh water clings to it."

Lying back on the sledge Vaamcho thought of his father's words of counsel, and the kind old face rose before him.

It was the dead of night. The wind howled amid the pack ice. Vaamcho, snuggling close to the warm bodies of the dogs, fell asleep. But not for long. Disturbing thoughts drove sleep away.

"How did it happen? The wind must have pressed on the pack ice, which acted like a sail. The ice farthest from the shore was first to give way."

Towards noon, when it grew a little lighter and the moon struggled out from behind the tumbled clouds, Vaamcho stepped outside. Taking his rifle and accompanied by the dogs, from whom he was resolved never again to be separated, he went over to the edge of the ice floe. He squatted down behind the cover of an ice pack and

scanned the patch of open water. It was clear to him that no seals could be expected.

"One should not sit long out in the cold when there is nothing to eat," said Vaamcho, and got slowly to his feet. "And the less a hungry man walks about the better."

As they drew near to their lair the dogs ran on ahead.

"I should not have gone out hunting," thought Vaamcho. "One must not hunt for thirty days when a person dies in the yarang. And my mother llineut froze to death only twenty-six days ago. I have broken the law, and the evil spirits have ensnared me."

Two days passed. There had been a jamming of the ice on the previous night which closed up the fissure. There were no seals about, and Vaamcho and the dogs were beginning to feel the pangs of hunger.

"We shall have to eat one of the dogs, Chegit," said Vaamcho. "We could wait a little longer, but a hungry man is liable to freeze."

He took the dog Milyutalgyn by the collar and led him aside. The knife thrust in the heart was so swift and sudden that the victim had no time to utter a sound.

Vaamcho slaked his thirst with the hot blood and ate his fill of the warm flesh. He went back to the shelter and fed the dogs. He slept soundly that night.

In the morning he was awakened by a pale moonbeam that filtered through a crack in the block of ice that barred the entrance to the cave. Vaamcho jumped up, kicked open the "door" and went outside. A new fissure had formed nearby. The sea was calm, the wind had died down, and only a gentle swell gave a slight rocking motion to the ice floe.

Suddenly, quite close to him, Vaamcho saw a seal swimming by. He swiftly raised his rifle. The shot went home.

"Now we shall have plenty to eat!" cried Vaamcho delightedly.

Seals appeared at frequent intervals, and in a short time Vaamcho had shot five of them and hauled their carcasses onto his ice floe.

"See how much food we have, Chegit? And we went and killed poor Milyutalgyn. If only we had waited a little longer!..."

Vaamcho lashed the seals together and hauled them to his lair. The dogs licked their chops in anticipation and gobbled up chunks of snow saturated with seal's blood.

"How much meat and fat," thought Vaamcho as he dressed the carcasses. "And when a man has plenty of meat and fat his heart sings."

Vaamcho decided to build a campfire. He took the bones of the seal, carefully scraped the flesh off them, split them down and laid them out cunningly with layers of dog's hair dipped in seal fat. He blew up the fire and soon it was crackling merrily.

"How many days, Chegit, have we not known what it is to laugh? And now laughter has come back again! It always comes with food. A belly filled with seal meat and hot water makes a man merry. Not so when there is nothing but wind in his guts."

The empty tobacco tin did duty as a teacup and Vaamcho drank with great relish the hot water that he had melted down from snow.

"Who knows, Chegit—maybe a white bear may turn up too. O-o! Then life will be as good as in a yarang!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Countless are the herds of Echavto. Incalculable are his riches. Where the herds of his reindeer have passed the moss will not grow anew for three warm summers.

His reindeer are broken up into ten herds. In each herd there are twenty times twenty, another twenty times twenty, and again twenty times twenty—in all 1,200 head in each herd. The reindeer of old Echavto cannot be kept in a single herd. They would famish for lack of moss and run away.

In each herd there were ten tents wherein dwelt the herdsmen with their families. Over a hundred people lived on Echavto's bounty.

Echavto permitted every herdsman to keep a few reindeer of his own. This gave the herdsman a sense of proprietorship, and he ran himself off his legs tending to his own and his master's huge herd which grazed together.

For three days now Alitet had been scouring the tundra in search of Echavto's herds, seeking in vain on his fleet-footed dogs amid the gorges and hills and the boundless plains. Unless a man be gifted with the scent of the wild beast he will never come upon the trail of these herds.

A wind blew over the tundra. It was so strong that the dogs could hardly stand up against it. Alitet brought the team to a halt and went down on all fours, searching the ground for spoor. He picked up some deer droppings and studied them. They would tell him how long ago the herd had passed this way. Alitet dug up the snow with his gee pole and examined bits of moss, grasses and osier leaves. They would tell him which way the reindeer herds had passed.

The dog-team sped on again athwart the wind. Presently the lead dog caught the scent of human habitation, swerved sharply to the left and spurred forward.

A figure loomed up in the dark. Alitet sharply reined in the sledge.

"Who is that?" he called out.

The man recognized the voice, went up closer and greeted Alitet by name:

"Alitet?"

"Yes, I am Alitet. Where do you come from?"

"I am Rento, a herdsman from Echavto's camp. It is a bad night. A night for wolves. Very bad. I cannot sleep. It must be hard for the men to guard the herd, so



I am going to them to help. There are eight of my own reindeer in the herd."

"Is the herd far from here?"

"No, quite near. A man can run it in two sweats."

"And where do the yarangs stand?"

"Here, quite close. I'll show you."

And the herdsman ran ahead of the dogs.

"You run well," said Alitet when he drove into the camp.

"Yes, I run well," answered Rento, flattered by the praise.

"Is Echavto in this camp?"

"No. He is in another. Stay the night here. Maybe the snowstorm will be over tomorrow. Why forsake the warmth?"



"Is the other herd a long way off?"

"No, it's quite near. A man can run it probably in ten sweats. But spend the night here."

"No. You run on ahead and I shall follow."

"Ehei!" said Rento resignedly, and placing his staff on his shoulder, he ran out into the cold wind-swept gloom.

Rento soon disappeared from view and only the lead dog Charlie hung on his trail.

Now and again the herdsman stopped and shouted: "Ehei!" which meant: "Here I am!"

And then he ran on again in the pitch dark. At last he ran into the camp, stopped leaning on his staff for Alitet to come up, then said with a smile:

"Here are the yarangs. Now I will run off to the herd."

"Wait. Take some of this good tobacco for a smoke."

Rento was overjoyed.

"Have Echavto's men trapped many foxes?"

"Oh yes, very many!"

"Well, run off now!"

And Rento ran back.

As soon as it became known that Alitet had arrived the whole camp was set astir. Night seemed to have ended and people thought it time to be up and about.

Old Echavto had also woken up and lay on downy skins of reindeer, covered with a fox blanket. He called his four wives to him, and pulling at his long thin beard, issued instructions to them:

"Eipinga, you go outside and give Alitet meat. The worst we have. These men from the coast are mice eaters.

They have no idea of good venison. All they know is to make a noise with their teeth and cram all sorts of rubbish into their shrivelled stomachs."

"You mean meat for his dogs, Echavto?"

"Yes, yes. These people eat the same food as their dogs. But do not give him too little—we do not want to get him offended. And you, Kima, go to Piliak and tell him to run to the herd and fetch the calf with the white stripe on its upper lip."

"Echavto! There is a heavy snowstorm. Will Piliak be able to find the calf among the herd?"

"Do as you are told, fool woman. Am I asking you to do more? He will find it. You, Keipa, light another burner. Light two burners. Echavto is not such a poor man that he should meet a guest in the dark—a trading guest at that! And there is work for you, too, Viya. Get out my fine doeskin trousers and get me inside them. Otherwise the guest may think me poor, seeing me in my own skin."

Alitet entered the yarang.

"You have come, Alitet?" said Echavto with demonstrative coolness.

"Yes," answered the guest carelessly and threw himself down on the skins, rubbing his chilled hands.

"And so the news has come to your ears that we need goods? We do not need much."

"Yes, the news has reached my ears. I have brought a few things. Some knives, and files, and bells for the reindeer, and needles, and rifles and tobacco. Just a few things."

The women threw up their hands, amazed at the lavish assortment of goods. Old Echavto was displeased at his wives' behaviour. He glanced at them sternly and they instantly effaced themselves. He himself listened to Alitet with little nods, denoting a tacit satisfaction, then said:

"Keipa! Must the guest speak with a dry throat? Where is the tea?"

Keipa, a dark-skinned young woman, as nimble as a fox, swiftly poured out the tea.

Alitet went out into the passage where his bag lay. He expected to have a drink tonight—he would have to drink a lot without losing his head. He groped about in the dark until he found a lump of butter which Charlie had given him specially for this purpose and swallowed it. The firewater would then simply burn his inside without making his head go crazy. For Alitet had not come all this way merely to have a good time.

He re-entered the yarang and tossed a handful of rusks onto the little table with the air of a benefactor.

Tea with rusks—food for the gods! The women uttered little cries of delight.

"Women are born gluttons," remarked Echavto. "The mad creatures would fain devour their own tongues together with the rusks."

"That is the food of the white men," said Alitet.

"Rotten food. I would not touch it." After a pause Echavto broached the subject of trade. "My men have also trapped a few red foxes," he said blandly.

"Yes, and white foxes and silver foxes too," blurted out that magpie Keipa.

"Hist!" snarled Echavto.

God only knows what she would be saying next if you did not stop her.

"What are you sitting there staring like owls?" he said to his wives. "Or do you think our guest must rinse his guts with water all the time? Or have you forgotten that a traveller requires solid food? Or do you think that Echavto has not enough food? Serve up the best food that can be found in my yarang."

The women scuttled off like mice to obey their lord's behest.

Indeed, they would spare no pains to please such an important guest. It was not every day that one met such men in the tundra.

Keipa ground the reindeer meat between her strong young teeth, set it out in a wooden bowl, mixed it with reindeer brains and rolled the grey mass into small patties which she then carried outside to chill.

The other wives were breaking up raw frozen meat with a stone hammer, cutting up cooked venison, taking out of the pot and laying out reindeer tongues and preparing a salad of green leaves, edible herbs and roots seasoned with seal fat. What a variety of rich and savoury dishes they prepared! It does not take four women long to serve up a variety of delicacies when there is abundance in the home!

Echavto said:

"Rank meat swells the stomach. My only food is the tongues of reindeer, light fat and the flesh of young calves. I have sent for a good calf."

After a slight pause, the old man enquired in a low eager voice:

"Have you any licker?""*

"I have. Alitet always has."

Echavto smacked his lips in anticipatory delight.

Alitet thought this an opportune moment to speak what was on his mind:

"Echavto, I have no reindeer. Live reindeer. I have no herd. We people on the coast are poor people. If there is hunting in the sea we have food. If there is no hunting we have no food. But you do not have to go out in the sea after the reindeer. That is why I wish to have a herd of my own."

The old man's face assumed a wary look and he said evasively:

* Liquor.—*Trans.*

"We here in the tundra are poor people too. Now the wolves devour the reindeer, now the pasturage gets covered with ice, now the herd gets taken with disease. You have none of these troubles on the coast. The wolves do not devour the seals and walruses. But we here have no end of these afflictions."

Echavto silently signed to his wives to serve the food. They lost no time over it and brought in bowl after bowl of different kinds of food. Echavto sampled each bowl himself before offering it to his guest. Alitet took a large reindeer's tongue which he hastily cut up and began swallowing greedily in great chunks. The tender meat fairly melted in the mouth. Keipa moved a bowl with the brain patties up to the guest. This holiday dish called *prerem*, was so delicious that one could almost swallow his tongue in eating it.

Alitet solemnly placed a bottle of diluted alcohol on the table. Echavto fondled the bottle with trembling hands.

"This firewater is good. It will not freeze in the severest frost," said Alitet as he poured out two mugs.

The women fell upon the rusks and began crunching them with great zest.

Alitet clinked mugs with Echavto. The latter gasped as the fiery liquid ran through his body, but he touched none of the food in order not to spoil the effect. He said:

"Why did you touch cups? Do you perhaps wish to become my marriage friend? Eh? Look how many wives I have!"

Alitet's head reeled at this pleasant turn in the conversation. He had long wanted to cement his business relations with Echavto by a marriage partnership. Nevertheless he feigned indifference to the subject and began to beat about the bush.

"I have a friend, the Merican. We always touch cups when we drink the firewater with him. You have to know

the proper way of handling firewater—it is made in the land of the white men! . . . What you have said about our marriage partnership does my heart good. I have two wives now, Echavto. I shall soon have three. And I really see no reason why we should not form a marriage friendship and become nevtooms.

They drank a second mug and exchanged pipes.

The women began chattering in animated whispers. The compact had been sealed before their eyes. It only remained to see upon whom Alitet's choice would fall.

Alitet, assuming the tone of master, cried to the women:

"Bring in my goods."

The women quickly unloaded the sledge and brought the goods into the yarang. Echavto, already well in his cups, crawled about among the plugs of tobacco and bricks of tea and ran his fingers greedily over each article strewn on the floor.

"This is all for you, Echavto. I give it to you without counting it—all of it. For are you not my marriage friend, now, my nevtoom?"

"Hok! Hok!" crowed the old man. "All the pelts of the foxes, white, blue and silver—all will I give to you without stint. And these goods now are all mine."

Alitet drew out of his bag a brand-new Winchester, then a second, a third—ten in all! A whole heap of rifles.

"Hok!" exclaimed Echavto, all atwitter. "Hok! Grr! I shall give you an extra twenty reindeer from my herds for each of these rifles. Women, bring in the reindeer ear quickly. Let Alitet show how he wishes his reindeer to be marked."

Keipa staggered into the yarang carrying a whole reindeer's head. Alitet swiftly made two incisions on the tip of the ear.

"That is my mark, friend!" he cried and pulled out another bottle.

"Give here your cups, women!"

"Do not waste it on them," interposed Echavto. "I shall keep it for later on."

"I have plenty more for you, my friend!"

"Hok! Hok! Grr! Very well! Drink then, women!" cried the inebriated old man, crawling over the skins on all fours. Entirely overcome he presently lay huddled in a corner.

The drink went to the women's heads. They began to sing. Their half-naked bronzed bodies with waving arms and shaking heads swayed in rhythm to the music.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The ice floes drifted shorewards. The wind had veered round and now blew from the sea. Vaamcho could no longer sleep. He paced back and forth across his little island all night with the dogs at his heels keeping a keen lookout on the shifting ice fields. A heady wind blew all night, rising in the morning to gale strength which began to drive the ice against the shore with terrific pressure.

"Chegit! Chegit! Look, there's land there, the coast!"

He ran alongside the sledge, helping the dogs to drag it.

The ice began to pack. Huge sheets reared up crushing against each other with an ominous crash. Man and dogs raced pell-mell for the safety of the beach, away from this appalling chaos of clashing ice and menacing sea.

Vaamcho stepped onto the beach at midday. The familiar sight drew from him a deep breath of relief. His eyes shone with joy.

Still incredulous of his hairbreadth escape, he dug up the snow to assure himself that there was land underneath. He yearned for the feel of earth in his hand.

Further inland he recognized the familiar contours of Cape Prkatagen. There, under the hillside was human habitation. From here, riding on good dogs, it was one day's journey to Enmakai.

"Well, Chegit, now we are home!" cried Vaamcho gaily. "There's our settlement, beyond that hill. Now we can have a good long smoke."

Vaamcho sat down on a piece of driftwood and lit up his pipe.

Though he had few matches left he began to play with them, striking them against the box and throwing them about him. Vaamcho took a childish delight in watching the flying flames.

"I must leave myself one match," thought Vaamcho, then got up and started out.

He rode without stopping. The dogs ran on at an even pace, then suddenly dashed along at breakneck speed. Vaamcho felt a thrill of joy.

"That must be Enmakai," he thought.

Their flight was brought to an abrupt halt as both team and sledge pitched over a huge snowdrift in which the yarang lay buried almost to the roof.

Vaamcho entered the little passage.

"Who is there?" sounded the familiar voice of Tygrena.

"It is I," answered Vaamcho.

Old Vaal, in his haste to see his son, stumbled to his feet and got entangled in the hanging skins of the polog like a fish in the meshes.

A smile lit up the old man's wrinkled face.

"Vaamcho, is that you?" he asked.

Vaamcho crawled into the polog and sat down in silence facing his father.

The old man was first to break the silence.

"See, Tygrena is looking after the burner and has brought some fat. . . ."

Tygrenea gazed all the time at Vaamcho without uttering a word. She held in her hand a little stick for stirring the moss in the burner. Vaamcho said:

"Look Tygrenea, how the burner is smoking. It wants tending."

Tygrenea, with a flash of joy in her face, ran to do his bidding.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The people of the Enmakai settlement rejoiced at Vaamcho's home-coming as greatly as did the people in this land rejoice over every newborn child.

When Tygrenea came home Korauge, the shaman, said:

"Chegit must be sacrificed to Kele, the Evil Spirit."

When Vaal heard this he sighed and said softly:

"Vaamcho, the dog Chegit must be sacrificed."

"I am sorry for the dog, father," said Vaamcho sadly. "He helped to save my life. I will not kill him."

"What words are those, my son? They pain my heart. If Korauge hears of them the evil spirits will forever haunt our yarang. And you have yet long to live."

Vaamcho went outside. In passing the dogs he averted his face, not to meet the eye of Chegit. "A dog, like a man, understands everything."

Vaamcho walked passed the yarangs and gazed at the icebound sea.

"I should have gone straight up to Chegit and taken him. Why put it off? Why did I come out here and walk past him?..."

Vaamcho pulled out his knife and passed his hand over the blade. It was sharp enough to shave a beard."

It was a bitter frost outside, but Vaamcho felt hot. He flung off his hat which hung down his back by the chin strap and with a heavy heart walked slowly over to the dogs.

Chegit lay curled up in a ball with his muzzle hidden under his belly. At the approach of Vaamcho the dog instantly raised its head, got to its feet and stretched its back, yawning and wagging a bushy tail.

Vaamcho went outside with it and walked on in silence. Upon reaching the end of the settlement he sat down on a snow bank. Chegit stretched himself at his feet. Vaamcho, with a swift movement, seized the dog's head, thrust it between his knees and raised the knife over the animal's heart. But Vaamcho's nerve failed him. He could not kill the dog. He stared at the glinting steel and flung the knife from him.

Chegit lay on his back in the snow with all four paws dangling lazily in the air.

Vaamcho's face grew dark and grim. "I am like a wolf! No, I am not a wolf, for this is Korauge's bidding which I am forced to do. No doubt he wants Chegit to be killed because I did not give him to Alitet. Kattam merkichkin!" he swore. "No, I am worse than a wolf. A reindeer cannot be the friend of a wolf, yet Chegit is a friend to me!..."

Vaamcho got to his feet.

"Let us go over there, Chegit! Behind that little mound."

Vaamcho walked like a man who is ill. His feet stumbled in the snow.

He stole a glance at the dog following at his heels, and it seemed to him that Chegit was well aware of his intentions.

"Ai!" cried Vaamcho in a tone of deep anguish. He felt his heart would break.

Chegit raised his head and looked affectionately at his master.

Vaamcho suddenly felt that he could not endure that look. He turned away and stood for a long time without stirring. Then he spun round, seized Chegit by the

muzzle and in the twinkling of an eye plunged the knife into the dog up to the hilt.

Vaamcho wanted to pull out the knife but his arms suddenly went limp, as though he had been rowing heavily. A big tear rolled down his cheek and froze on his chin.

Vaamcho took the head of the dead dog in both his hands and pressed his face to it. Dipping his finger in the dog's congealed blood Vaamcho drew a line with it across his forehead.

"Let the spirits be appeased!" he thought.

Vaamcho took hold of the dog by its hind paw and dragged it along the ground against the fur as custom demanded.

Suddenly he stopped.

"I will not drag it this way. I will take it my own way, custom or no custom."

He threw the body of Chegit onto his back and carried it to the yarang, holding it by the forepaws. It looked as if the dog was embracing him from behind. Chegit's head swayed from side to side.

Striding on thus, whom should he meet but Korauge the shaman. Vaamcho walked past him in silence.

"Wretched man, he always wants to do things in his own way! Why does he carry the dog on his back?!" thought the shaman angrily.

Vaamcho laid the body of Chegit outside the yarang with its head facing the East, whence the sun rises.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Rifle shots rang out amid the pack ice. Every shot brought joy to men's hearts. The more shots the more meat would there be.

All over the fringes of the watery patches amid the

ice fields sat hunters from the Enmakai settlement.

The bloodstained carcasses of two seals, shot through the head, lay beside Vaamcho. The latter, well pleased with the day's hunting, sat on an ice block, tapping his pipe against it. He wanted to smoke, but found that his tobacco tin was empty. After holding the pipe for a while between his teeth he ruefully put it away under his parka.



Vaamcho stepped over the broken ice to ask for some tobacco from a neighbour. He caught sight of Tygrena sitting near the water: At her side lay the carcasses of three shot seals.

"Kakomei, Tygrena!" Vaamcho cried joyfully. "Three seals! Why, you are a great hunter!"

"I missed the fourth one," she said, slightly abashed.

Vaamcho sat down on a frozen carcass.

"Yes, I have tobacco," said Tygrena with a smile, and handed him a tobacco pouch sewn from reindeer skin. They both lit up.

"It is a fine day, Vaamcho."

"Yes, it is. But it is time to go home. I wanted to kill another seal but it looks as though I shall have to help you in getting your seals home."

"You are very good, Vaamcho! I would agree to become your wife."

Vaamcho was thrown into confusion, and in order to change the conversation he said:

"Korauge said that the seals dislike me, that their eyes do not wish to meet mine. But two seals looked at me and they are now lying beside my rifle."

"Korauge is a wicked man," said Tygrena with loathing. "He does not speak the truth. To listen to a man

who lies is like drinking warm water. Even I like to look at you, not only the seals," she added with a smile.

After a pause Tygrena said in a low voice:

"Korange kept saying all the time that the spirits do not like Vaal's yarang. Ilineut froze to death and Vaamcho was carried out to sea. He said that Vaal should leave our settlement."

"And I did not get carried out to sea after all!" cried Vaamcho gaily. "Only I am very sorry for the dog. I often see Chegit in my dreams. He wags his tail, moves his legs and speaks to me with his eyes. Rather had I lost one of my eyes. A man may have one eye and still be able to hunt."

After they had smoked they got up and decided to go home.

They dragged the seals along over the ice. Vaamcho towed three seals behind him and Tygrena two. They walked on a long time in silence. Vaamcho's head was covered with hoarfrost and steaming.

Within sight of the yarangs the two hunters sat down on the carcasses to take a rest.

"There are the yarangs, Vaamcho," said Tygrena. "My legs refuse to take me thither."

"Alitet is a bad man?" asked Vaamcho timidly.

Tygrena replied with a silent nod.

"Vaal, my father, said that Alitet is a crafty and greedy man. He steals foxes from other men's traps. And my own mind tells me that he is wicked. I try to shun him when I see him."

"Your mind is similar to mine, as one seal is like another. I never knew what false people were before, and now I am becoming untruthful myself. Take one of my seals, Vaamcho, and I shall say that I shot only two."

"What hunter am I if I let a woman shoot seals for me. No, I cannot take it. Besides, Korange would detect the lie. It will be bad for you."

"I do not care. Some day I shall probably lose my mind and cut Korauge's throat. And you shoot Alitet, Vaamcho. Lie in wait for him by the traps. Catch a silver fox and put it in your trap. Alitet will try to steal it. Then you can shoot him."

Vaamcho went pale. Never before had he heard such words.

"Tygrena, I am afraid of you."

"Fear not, Vaamcho. No one can hear us. A breeze is blowing from the shore. We shall speak together only out in the ice fields. No one must know our thoughts. Vaal is a kind man, but do not tell him. He will fear the shaman."

"I shall tell no one. Only I shall know it."

"Alitet is a thief. He steals whatever he can. He stole me, too, as he steals foxes from other men's traps. He left Aye all alone. Narginaut told me that he even killed his son and daughter to drive the sickness out of his foul body. I shall never become a real woman in his yarang."

Tygrena fell silent, then said with a sigh:

"I often think, Vaamcho—why is it that men may choose nevtooms and women not?"

"It is the law."

"Yes, it is the law," said Tygrena with a sigh. Then, after a pause, she added: "I want the father of my child to be a real man. Young, strong, agile and kind."

Vaamcho puffed at his pipe in silence.

"I would choose you to be my nevtoom," said Tygrena.

Vaamcho turned his head away in embarrassment and sent out a cloud of smoke. Tygrena laughed.

"Why are you like that, Vaamcho—as timid as a seal?"

"Maybe because I am poor."

There was a pause. Then Tygrena said softly:

"Vaamcho, but I must become a real woman! I want a child. I want you to be its father."

When she came home Tygrena caught the sound of Alitet's voice. He was conversing with someone in loud tones.

"A remkylen* has arrived," she said to herself.

Ever since childhood the arrival of a guest had always been a joyful occasion for Tygrena, but now she was indifferent. She was even loath to enter the polog.

The blithe spirit which she had brought back with her from the broad expanses of the ice fields and the joy of a successful hunt suddenly vanished. She wanted to smoke, but had left her tobacco pouch with Vaamcho. She slipped noiselessly out of the little passage and ran off to Vaal's yarang.

There she found nearly all the hunters of the settlement assembled. They were drinking tea, while old Vaal, reclining on a couch of skins, was telling them stories. How good life was here! Tygrena squatted down and began to smoke.

The hunters finished their tea and begged Vaal to tell them another story.

"Make me a pipe!" said the old man.

The hunters all hastened to offer him their pipes.

"Why so many?" said Vaal with a smile. "One will do."

Slowly puffing at his pipe he began:

"I shall tell you about the beginning and birth of life. . . . There was a time when all the world was in darkness. On the rim of the night, there where the sun rises, sat the Maker, thinking how he could make light. He thought and thought, then created a crow and spoke thus to it:

* A guest — *Trans.*

“‘Go and peck a hole to let the Dawn in.’

“And the crow flew to the East and began pecking with its beak. Then it came back to the Maker and said: ‘I cannot break a hole through.’

“The Maker was angered. He seized the crow and threw it aside.

“‘You are of no use, you do not love work. Begone! I shall not feed you! Seek your own food!’

“He made a little bird. The bird flew to the East and began to peck. It pecked so long until its beak was torn, but it made a little hole and flew back.

“‘What have you done?’

“‘I have pecked a little hole.’

“‘Go and peck a bigger one.’

“The little bird flew back and began pecking again. Its beak was all torn, its body wasted and it lost all its feathers. But it pecked a big hole. The Dawn streamed through it and there was light in the world. The little bird walked back to the Maker, for it could not fly. There was no food on the way. The little bird wasted away still more, its bones grew very thin and it became still littler. But it came back to the Maker.

“‘I have done it. It is now light in the world,’ said the bird.

“‘Ah! Ah!’ said the Maker and he was very pleased.

“He put new feathers on the bird, sharpened what remained of its beak and gave it a dwelling beneath a mound, saying:

“‘Live and multiply!’ ”

Tygrene looked at Vaaincho. He smiled back at her.

“Then the Maker gathered the bones of seals about the earth and said: ‘Be thou men!’ ” Vaal continued. “The Maker created a white grouse and sent it into the world to see how people were living. The grouse flew down for a little while, then went back and said to the Maker:

" 'It is much too far, very bad. I could not reach it.'

"The Maker seized it by its tail and threw it into the willows.

" 'Live in the tundra. I shall not feed you. Seek food yourself.'

"Now, who could he send to find out what was going on on the earth?

"He made an owl.

"The owl went forth and reached the earth. It had big eyes that could see from afar. It saw four people—two men and two women. They stood on the earth and dared not sit down. The owl did not come back.

" 'How can I get news?' thought the Maker.

"He made a fox and said:

" 'Go!'

"The fox went, but it did not reach the earth. It came back and said deceitfully:

" 'There is no earth, there are no people. People indeed! There is nothing but emptiness.'

"The Maker seized it and threw it aside.

" 'You are of no use, you deceiver! I know that there are people. Live in the tundra and let me never catch sight of you. I will flay you if I do!'

"The Maker sent down many beasts, including the white fox and the wolf.

" 'You good-for-nothings! None of you can bring me tidings.'

"And so he went himself. He met a man, took him by the shoulder and sat him down. Then he sat a woman down beside him.

"Then they began to multiply and became a tribe.

"The Maker made reindeer, walruses and seals out of the willows and said:

" 'Here is food for you. Kill them and live.'

Vaal cleared his throat and wound up:

"That is all!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Sad thoughts crowded into Tygrena's mind whenever she had to leave old Vaal's yarang.

The men who gathered here were real, warmhearted men and she felt at home among them, forgot for a while the hateful irksome life in Alitet's yarang. At times ugly thoughts beset her. More than once had she thought of shooting herself. Aye was far away and had no doubt already taken himself a wife, for there were girls in the hills too. Vaamcho alone, whom she now met often in the ice fields, helped to dispel her gloomy thoughts.

And now, as she returned to her yarang, her spirits sank again. She got into the polog with a heavy heart and saw Echavto, the old reindeer herder, of whom the men had spoken in Vaal's yarang.

"Tygrena! You have come?" the guest greeted her in a cracked old voice.

"Yes, it is I," she answered apathetically and began taking off her fur garments in silence.

She squatted down by the burner and began drinking hot tea in big gulps.

Old Echavto, Alitet's new marriage partner, sat talking with his nevtoom and the shaman. Here, too, firewater was being drunk to seal Alitet's friendship with the rich herder.

Alitet, elated by his business successes, was in a cheerful frame of mind. Like the other male occupants of the stuffy yarang he sat naked on the skins, except for a small reindeer pelt thrown over his knees.

The three men were intoxicated and sat discussing reindeer, furs and the skins of sea animals.

"Your herd, Alitet, will grow bigger year by year. When the calving season comes your herd will double," said Echavto.

"When summer comes I shall cut a lot of walrus thongs, prepare a stock of sea lions' skins and sealskins and then buy still more reindeer," said Alitet, voicing his cherished dreams.

"Quite right, Alitet! The nomad reindeer people have great need of those goods. You will receive two live reindeer for every skin of a sea lion, and one reindeer for every coil of walrus thong."

"I shall take more tea and iron articles from the trading yarang of my friend Charlie and use it all to buy more reindeer. Charlie told me that reindeer are not worth much, they are bred here and there is a lot of them in Chukotsk, whereas iron things, brick tea and tobacco are not produced here. Every iron thing fetches a high price. One iron pot is worth one reindeer, one knife a reindeer, one brick of tea a reindeer. Iron needles are not produced here either and are worth a lot. Our women have now forgotten the use of bone needles. Yes, Echavto, it is hard for a man to live these days without iron things. I shall help the nomad people with Tang things and you help me to make a big herd."

"Alitet, you are my friend. I have always told the reindeer people: Alitet is doing a great service to our hill folk. You go yourself to the hills and bring goods with you. You make the life of the hill folk easier," Echavto said ingratiatingly.

Korauge the shaman, who had hitherto been silent, suddenly spoke:

"My father had great herds of reindeer. But the spirits, whom he failed to appease, sent a blight on the herds and they perished. After that we moved to the coast and lived among the mice eaters. I was a small boy at the time."

"Korauge speaks truly," said Echavto.

"Yes, yes. It is a great truth. My father was a great herder, but he died here, on this coast, a poor man, a

hunter of the sea beast. Now I have become friendly with the spirits. They do my bidding. And before I die I shall help you, Alitet, to make a big herd. And when I depart thither," he said pointing skywards, "I shall tell your grandfather—We have found your herds again."

Echavto's wizened face was covered with beads of sweat. His long beard was moist. Dashing the sweat from his face he said in a wheedling tone:

"My men are tending your herd well, Alitet. Not a single one of your reindeer will get lost from the fold or be devoured by the wolves."

"Echavto," said Alitet tipsily, "you are my dearest friend by wife. My first wife is now like an old seal. She has lost most of her fat and her skin hangs loose.... But my second wife...."

He chuckled and added:

"You have never seen anyone like her...."

Tygrena looked up startled and gave closer attention to the conversation. A little shiver ran up her spine.

She stole a glance at old Echavto and was overcome by a sudden impulse to rush out of the yarang.

And when Alitet said that Echavto would take his place that night, the colour receded from Tygrena's face and she said in a fierce whisper:

"I won't!"

The sudden outburst left Alitet dumbfounded and bereft of speech.

No one in his yarang had yet violated the customs of his people. Echavto smiled wryly. So great was Alitet's wrath that he could think of nothing better to do than hastily dress himself and rush out of the yarang.

Echavto crept up to Tygrena like a crafty old wolf.

"The young beast is always frightened and snarls. But when it gets accustomed it will eat out of your hand."

Echavto sidled up closer and laid a bony hand on Tygrena's shoulder.

Tygrena pushed him fiercely from her, and the old man went flying onto a pile of skins in the far corner.

At that moment Alitet came in. Echavto, with a sardonic grin, murmured:

"The little she-cub bites, it seems! Like the untamed young roe in the herd that will not let herself be lassoed."

Alitet walked over to Tygrena in silence and gave her a kick. Her eyes gleamed with hatred. She crouched into a corner, her teeth clenched and eyes blazing like a trapped animal.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Tygrena lay awake that night. She lay thinking of her childhood, and the games she had played in Yanrakenot, she remembered her father and her poor young betrothed Aye and Vaamcho. She buried her face in the deerskin and wept softly. These were the first tears in her young life.

The drunken men slept heavily. It was hot and stuffy in the polog. Without lighting the burner Tygrena found her torbazes and fur garments in the dark and slipped out noiselessly into the passage.

The cold air acted bracingly and Tygrena hastily began dressing herself for a journey.

Suddenly she remembered that she had forgotten her knife and crept back for it into the inner apartment.

Tygrena had made up her mind to run away, to go back to Yanrakenot, to her father Kamenvat. She ran swiftly down the hillside and sped on as fast as her legs could carry her without once looking round. Hot and panting she reached the adjacent hill and stopped. The night was on the wane. The moon seemed to have tum-

bled from the roof of the sky onto the ice packs. Dark, threatening clouds crept across the sky. The moon was encircled by a ring of orange, the precursor of a blizzard.

It was the moon of the Stubborn Old Bull, and the moon of the Freezing Udder was setting in. Tygrena looked around and thought: "There will be a heavy blizzard. . . . But, I shall not go back, never! . . ." And she sped on again. Now and then she stopped to rest. She had already covered a considerable distance. Were it daylight the hill on which the Enmakai settlement stood would not be visible from where she was. But strange to say her legs did not feel at all tired. Her heart beat fast, but it was from joy and not from running. She ran on for a long time, keeping to the coast line, but imperceptibly to herself gradually struck off into the tundra. Suddenly Tygrena became aware that the familiar landmarks had disappeared. She had lost the trail and did not know how far she had strayed from the coast. Turning sharply to the direction of the sea she ran on again. A hare darted out of the willows. Its sudden appearance startled Tygrena. But the hare as suddenly stopped dead in its tracks, looked at Tygrena, then made off in a flash.

"Wait for me, little hare!" Tygrena cried out loudly. "Let us run together!"

She had cried out in order to drive away her fear. The sound of her own voice in the dark wilderness cheered her.

The hare had vanished. Tygrena felt a stab of panic at the realization of her loneliness amid a landscape that was no longer familiar to her eyes.

Tygrena climbed the slope of a hill and surveyed the scene around her. The mountains rolled away endlessly in the distance. Tygrena anxiously scanned their dim contours, then suddenly uttered a cry of joy:

"Why, that is the Walrus Head mountain! The one my father Kamenval told me stories about when he took me as a child on a visit to the reindeer people."

Cheered by what she had seen Tygrena ran confidently down the stony hillside towards the sea. Suddenly she remembered that she had forgotten to take her pipe and tobacco. That was worse than the blizzard. Meanwhile the blizzard had sprung up in all earnest. Fierce gusts of wind swept low over the ground. The sky was black and blotted out the stars.

"One must not walk about in a blizzard," thought Tygrena, remembering the stories she had heard narrated by the old hunters. "It is best to sit and wait for it to blow over. A blizzard is not dangerous to him who does not fear it."

Tygrena found a spot to shelter her from the storm. Barely had she dug herself in when the snowflakes were whirled up in the air by a boisterous wind. The storm broke and howled about her.

Tygrena crouched deeper into her lair. She tied her sleeves about her wrists and pulled her head into her parka. A pleasant warmth stole through her body. She curled up and went to sleep.

The blizzard was soon over. After two days the sky cleared, the stars shone out, and Tygrena crept out of her shelter. The pangs of hunger and thirst assailed her. Hunger made her senses keener.

Tygrena decided to look for fox traps set with walrus bait. She knew where the hunters set their traps. Her search, however, was fruitless. At last she found a rusty old trap on a chain beneath a little mound, but there was no bait in it. After a long search she finally caught sight from afar of a white fox who was going round in circles on one spot. The fox had its paw caught in a trap and was endeavouring to shake it free. Next to it lay a lump of seal flesh. The frightened animal had

not even touched the bait. It must have been spinning about a long time, for its trapped leg was broken and the injured limb was held in place by the bare skin.

Tygreña strangled the fox, set the trap again and laid the dead fox beside it. The meal bait was frozen so hard that her knife could not cut it. Tygreña with difficulty chipped off several pieces of the meat and hungrily swallowed them.

She would have liked to slake her thirst with the hot blood of the fox, but did not want to spoil the skin.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

It was an unusual day in Yanrakenot. The only talk in all yarangs was of Kamenvat's wife, who had "given her word" and was making preparations for her journey to the dwellers of the Upper World.

She had been ill for many days. Her arms and legs were swollen. Her face wore a look of utter apathy. An evil spirit was haunting Kamenvat's yarang, and life in it had become very hard.

The neighbours, fearing the evil spirits, shunned this dwelling, and only Aye would sometimes leave a piece of meat or a little fat in the passage, Kamenvat himself never stepped outside his yarang lest he bring trouble on his fellow tribesmen.

The sick old woman realized the sorrow and pain she was causing her kinstolk.

"Why burden people's lives?" she thought. "Why, when there is such a thing as honourable and voluntary death?"

And all the people in the settlement looked at it in the same way. Everybody agreed that it was best for the old woman to join the people of the Upper World

of her own free will. But every person is the master of his own life. And so everyone waited until the old woman herself would ask for death.

One morning, when Kamenvat was lighting the burner, he heard the voice of the old woman.

"Kamenvat, I must go. It is time. I can tarry no longer. I gave this word yesterday in my thoughts and now I give it with my tongue."

"Had you not better wait a little longer? Maybe the evil spirits will quit our yarang and you will not have to leave me all alone?" said Kamenvat wistfully.

"No," the old woman replied firmly. "I have thought a lot yesterday. I did not sleep at all last night, preparing myself to say 'the word.' I now say once more—it is time for me to go to the dwellers of the Upper World."

Kamenvat decided to send for Tygrena. Alitet, too, should be present to help a person on her journey to the Upper World.

While they were discussing the coming event some one in the passage made known his presence by a cough.

"Aye, is that you who have come?"

"No, it is not Aye. Tygrena has come."

"What do my ears hear? Is it an evil spirit that has come to torment me?" Kamenvat whispered to the old woman. "Did you not hear that voice too?"

"Yes, I heard it. No doubt Tygrena's heart has spoken to her about my 'great day'."

Kamenvat hastily lifted the skin of the polog, peered out into the passage and cried:

"Tygrena!"

"Yes, it is I," she said wearily.

Tygrena crawled into the polog and suddenly recoiled at the sight of her mother's ravaged face. She had heard that her mother was ill but had not thought it was as bad as this.

Silence fell upon the yarang. All its occupants were miserable, each in his own way. And none dared break the silence first.

At length the mother spoke:

"You have come, Tygrena. You have done well. Today is a 'great day' for us. Lay out that new skin for Alitet."

Tygrena shook her head in silence.

"Alitet is not here. He is not wanted. He is in Enmakai. . . . I ran away from him. . . ."

Kamenvat stared at Tygrena and cried in consternation:

"What do I hear? Or has Kele come to dwell in my ears?"

Kamenvat's voice dropped as he went on weakly:

"Tygrena, what will be now? None of our people has ever done this before. Or was it the evil spirits that pointed out to you the way of flight? You must go back at once."

"No, Kamenvat, I shall not go back. Even a mouse has a heart, and a mouse can become enraged," returned Tygrena.

"How much woe is mine! Why must one man have so much!"

The sick old woman made no comment on her daughter's conduct. She would not be here to mend it. She was past caring. Her only thought was the "word" which she had given that morning.

"People, make haste! My time has come. Hurry, or, I shall be late!" the old woman muttered in great agitation.

Preparations were hastily made for the "last tea." A walrus thong was brought out. The only article of the ritual that was missing in the house was a reindeer fetus for putting round the woman's neck. And most important of all, another intimate person was lacking to attend the ceremony.

Tygrena hung the kettle over the burner and went outside.

She stood in the doorway of the yarang. People were walking about, but none approached the yarang of Kamenvat. They greeted Tygrena from a distance.

Aye caught sight of Tygrena.

"O, kakomei, Tygrena!" he cried excitedly and ran up to her.

"Aye, it is death's day in our yarang. And a member of the family is missing whose voice my mother might hear for the last time. You are the only one who still dwells here," she said pointing to her heart.

"Tygrena, let her hear my voice," said Aye quickly.

"We have no reindeer fetus to wrap about her neck."

"I have two," said Aye. "I shall run and get one."

"Wait, Aye! There is great sorrow in our yarang."

Aye looked puzzled and said:

"Have our people ceased to consider it a great joy when one of them hurries to join the dwellers of the Upper World?"

"I mean sorrow for Kamenvat," said Tygrena.

Aye stood looking at her in perplexity.

"My wits must have dried in my head. I understand nothing."

"Last night . . . I ran away from Alitel," whispered Tygrena.

All Yanrakenot was petrified at the news.

In every yarang and every polog Tygrena was on everyone's lips. Her conduct was regarded as an ill omen. Tygrena's flight even eclipsed the importance of such an event as the voluntary death of Kamenvat's wife.

When all the preparations were completed the "last tea" was set out. There were four occupants of the yarang—the old woman, Kamenvat, Tygrena and Aye. They squatted down in a semi-circle while Tygrena, overcome with emotion, poured out the tea. Tea it was



not, but a herb gathered in the distant tundra which the local inhabitants used to brew before the white traders came to the coast. It was drunk without sugar. The parting day had to be such as it was years before any white man set foot on Chukotsk shores.

The old woman sat up dressed in a new fur garment and new deerskin torbazes. These clothes had been prepared well in advance. Those who were "remaining behind" were dressed in their ordinary clothes—Tygrena in a loin cloth, Kamenvat and Aye in light skin trousers.

Tea was drunk in utter silence. Presently the old woman leaving her tea unfinished passed her cup to Tygrena, saying:

"Enough, people. Tygrena, take my cup for yourself. You have still a long time to drink tea in."

The tea things were quickly cleared away and the old woman was moved to the middle of the apartment.

Her face wore an expression of utter indifference and resignation. It was as though she had already set out on her journey, leaving behind her forever the burden of this world's strife and cares. She looked at her dear ones with unseeing eyes. No one ever more heard her voice. The old woman dropped silently onto the reindeer skin and shut her eyes.

Tygrena, stifling her sobs, wrapped the skin of the unborn roe about her mother's neck. Kamenvat placed the noose of the thong over the skin and Aye sat astride the old woman's knees and gripped her hands in his, pinning them down to the floor. The noose was drawn taut.

From outside came the long, dismal howl of the dogs.

The corpse was carried to the hills and laid out on the stones. Kamenvat slit open the garments to afford easy access to the body for the beasts and birds of prey.

Tygrena placed beside the body a teacup and saucer, a needle and some thread made of reindeer tendons.

A sledge drawn by a team of powerful dogs swept into view on the hill crest. It was Alitet come in pursuit of Tygrena.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Chukotsk Peninsula, remote as it was from the centres of culture, had been cut off from civilization for centuries. People's lives here were governed by unwritten laws. Superstition was man's constant companion from the cradle to the grave. For all that, the character of this people was conspicuous for bravery and endurance.

Here, in the middle of the 17th century, came an ordinary Russian Cossack, Semyon Dezhnev, in quest of new discoveries. Long before Vitus Bering, Dezhnev, in his frail boats, rounded the northeastern point of the Asiatic mainland—the Chukotsk Cape.

For more than a century thereafter the Russian Cossack explorers exacted from the refractory Chukotsk tribes an unwilling fealty to the Russian tsar.

Neither firearms nor cold steel could conquer these people. They were conquered by Russian tobacco, iron knives, axes, loaf sugar, spirits and other Russian wares shipped by Russian merchants from Yakutsk.

At the close of the 19th century, with the opening of a regular steamship line from Vladivostok, the first Russian governor of the Anadyr Region, Dr. Grinevitsky, came to this country.

Having made the acquaintance of the people he forwarded a request to his superiors to be allowed to call himself doctor instead of governor, since the Chukchi, in his opinion, were a free people who were not yet accustomed to the idea of authority.

Somewhat earlier, in 1867, Alaska, discovered and explored by Russians, was sold by the tsarist government to the United States.

From that time American whalers became frequent callers on Chukotsk shores, where they started trading operations on both sides of the Bering Strait.

"Take the whales but leave us the walruses. We must have something to hunt as well," the Chukchi said to the whalers. "You throw the walrus carcasses back into the sea all the same. You only need the tusks. Better let us give you the tusks."

Close on the heels of the whalers came the smugglers' schooners, buying up expensive furs for a mere song.

Representatives of Russian and foreign capital settled on the coast in their scramble for "pelts." In addition to the Russian merchants Danes, Norwegians, Americans and Englishmen had made their home here. Easy money was the sole object of these newcomers.

Such, too, was the object of Mr. Thompson who had settled down on these promising shores. For the past few years, ever since 1917, Charles Thompson keenly followed the American newspaper reports about the Russian revolution. The true import of these events, however, Mr. Thompson failed to grasp.

The Great October Revolution was plucking up the roots of the ancient regime in Russia, and its reverberations were but faintly borne to these distant shores.

Aye's extraordinary behaviour during the sale of the silver foxes and the appearance on the coast of some Russian partisan had put the American on his guard.

The spring of that year, 1923, was more than usually beautiful on the Chukotsk coast. The air was clear and limpid, and only the distant rumble of the sea disturbed the immense silence.

In the heart of the tundra the snow and ice had begun to melt, revealing thawed patches of earth here and there, and the Arctic sparrows had begun their migration back home. They flew about the still snow-clad tundra in search of food, bathed by the warming rays of the sun, their merry twitter sounding a note of life in the vast wilderness.

These harbingers of the Arctic summer, it would seem, had arrived too early. Yet they found food among the willows, in the river valleys and on the reindeer tracks. They nested hastily, the sooner to hatch their broods and fly off with them.

The ground squirrels, too, had awakened after their long winter's sleep. These nimble little animals crept out of their burrows and frisked about in the sun, running cautiously from one hole to another and scuttling away underground at the slightest hint of danger.

The shimmering air played tricks with objects which it distorted to huge dimensions, and from afar the ground squirrels could be taken by an inexperienced eye for running figures of human beings.

The smooth white snow still lay all around in a dazzling carpet. The sun hung in the skies morning and night.

Mr. Thompson turned over in bed when his American alarm clock went off with a shrill ringing. Charles Thompson buried his head under the pillow. The alarm went off again, and again Mr. Thompson buried himself in the pillows. The clock made six separate attempts to wake its owner.

Oh, it was a wonderful contraption, was this alarm clock!

Mr. Thompson played hide and seek with it until he grew fully awake.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. This, since 1901, when he had first come to this country, was Mr. Thompson's invariable hour of rising.

He got out of bed, his feet resting on a bearskin, and looked about him. The room was in darkness, save for a thin ray of light that streamed through a small hole in the heavy blind. It looked in the dark like a brilliant thread drawn from the upper part of the solitary window to the rocking chair that stood against the opposite wall.

The sight of this luminous thread suddenly irritated Mr. Thompson.

"Goddam these creatures! Twenty years of training hasn't taught them a thing! You could teach a damned seal to do almost anything in that time," he growled, and without getting off the bed, suddenly sang out:

"May!"

A middle-aged woman entered the room. Accustomed as she was to her husband's ways, Rultyna, with the soft swift movement of a squirrel in its burrow, glided in the dark towards the window to open the blind, but her husband stopped her.

"Wait! Do you see that hole through which the sun comes into my room?"

"Yes, I see it."

"That is careless! I do not want anything to disturb my sleep. You are not looking after the house properly," grumbled Mr. Thompson.

Rultyna heard her white husband's rebuke out in meek silence. She simply could not understand what Charlie wanted. Could he not see how real men slept out in the snow on dog sledges under all the rays of the sun!

"You may open the blind now," said Mr. Thompson.

The dazzling sunshine poured through the small window into the low-ceilinged little room, revealing a bed, a table, a makeshift bookcase and two cane chairs. On an overturned box in a corner stood a shining gramophone with a huge horn which was played only on Sundays.

The top shelf of the bookcase was occupied by the books of Jack London and the posthumous works of

Wedsley. On the middle and lower shelves lay piles of American newspapers and magazines, all of them a year old. They had been delivered by last summer's schooner together with a cargo of goods for the natives, and constituted Mr. Thompson's spiritual food. The periodicals and papers were neatly arranged in chronological order and Mr. Thompson read them consecutively, as though they had been delivered by that day's mail. The dates coincided except for the year. Mr. Thompson had every opportunity, if he wished to, of looking farther ahead, but being a man of careful and calculating habits he preferred not to take a premature interest in the world's affairs. And so Mr. Thompson was exactly one year behind the civilized times.

The little hut, which he had himself built out of packing cases, might easily have been replaced by a real house. He had but to say the word and the firm he dealt with would deliver him a house by the next boat.

But why should he? It was not as if he intended spending the rest of his life here. This little room was good enough at a scratch. What was the sense in throwing away good dollars?

Rocking himself in the chair Mr. Thompson finished his morning pipe, then pulled himself up ponderously and went over to the handmade calendar. He struck out yesterday's date—May 16, 1923. Putting the pipe away in the pocket of his checked shirt he crossed to the book-case and took a newspaper for May 17, 1922.

His wife re-entered from the little anteroom in which his family lived carrying the breakfast things. She placed on the table a coffee pot, a plate of bacon, some white bread baked over an oil lamp and sugar and silently withdrew.

Mr. Thompson sat down to the table with the "fresh" newspaper in his hand. He was to read what had happened in the world a year ago.

True, the news he was to learn had been the latest news for the crew of the schooner a year before. But Mr. Thompson had forbidden the ship's men to give him the latest news. Life had to run on methodically and smoothly, without leaps and bounds.

Mr. Thompson, with the paper up in front of him, was enjoying his third mug of Corona coffee when he suddenly brought the mug down on the table with a bang, dropped the newspaper and took off his horn-rimmed glasses. He wiped the glasses with a corner of his shirt and hastily put them on again.

He read the paper again, tensely bent over the table. His face drained slowly of colour. Presently he pushed the paper from him, jumped up from his seat and began pacing about the room, waving his smoked-out pipe.

"Well, I'll be damned! That's a bit of news for you! Some news, dammit!"

Mr. Thompson paced feverishly up and down the room, filling his pipe with Prince Albert tobacco.

Puffing furiously at his pipe Mr. Thompson rushed up to the table and reread the item of news that had thrown him out of his customary composure. It briefly stated that the Soviet Government had granted the North Company a concession to conduct trade among the population of Kamchatka, the Chukotsk Peninsula and the Anadyr Region and invited men with a knowledge of Russian and those able to work a rudder motor to apply for jobs.

For the past twenty-two years no item of news, not even the news about the revolution in Russia, had stirred him so greatly as this year-old report.

"The North Company! Why, the average businessman doesn't stand a dog's chance with a shark like that in the field!"

And as though in self-warning he exclaimed:

"One only has to remember how ruthlessly the North Company squeezed out and ruined even the big and most enterprising men on the Hudson Bay!"

The unusual mental effort left Mr. Thompson exhausted. He took up the newspaper and deposited his bulk into the rocking chair.

He read the distressing item again, then flung the paper away from him and let his head, with its sparse and rumpled growth of reddish hair, drop onto the back of the old rocking chair.

Now he was determined to stay on. He would yield this territory to no one.

"Oh, I'll have the ball at my own feet, see if I don't!"

Nevertheless, the thought of an incursion by the North Co. made him shudder. He knew this company's bag of tricks only too well. This powerful firm with its huge private fleet would lose no time in capturing the market. They would begin by working at a loss and then start raking in the money.

"May!" yelled Mr. Thompson.

And when his wife timidly entered in response to his call he bellowed:

"Whisky!"

Rultyna promptly obeyed, though not without wonder. She had never known Charlie take whisky in the morning after his coffee. Rultyna could not remember a similar precedent in all their twenty years of married life. Her husband's conduct that morning alarmed her. She decided that Charlie was going out of his mind.

Mr. Thompson swallowed a stiff dose. Suddenly a thought struck him and he slapped his forehead:

"Dammit! I've still got Alitet! And with Alitet by me I've got the whole say here—I'm the law and I'm the politics! I can give out advances through him and buy up all the furs off the stump. Ha-ha-ha! I'll steal a march

on the North Company. It can buy up the ducks' eggs if it wants—there won't be anything else for it to buy. I guess they won't like that very much!"

Mr. Thompson pictured to himself the company's big steamer arriving with its holds full of merchandise and not being able to buy a single pelt. Alitot would buy up all the furs in advance. It didn't matter if Mr. Thompson brought off this operation at a loss. It didn't matter if his account with the Washington bank showed no increased balance this time. Talk about competition!

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Mr. Thompson's family, consisting of his native wife and six children, lived apart in a skin polog set up in the chilly anteroom adjoining his own room. They lived in the Chukchi way, using the moss burner to heat and light their apartment, sleeping on reindeer skins and feeding on the cheap meat of the walrus and seal. The upkeep of his family did not put a great strain on Mr. Thompson's pocket. Yarak, whom Mr. Thompson had adopted as a boy and who now served him in the capacity of handy man, lived together with the rest of the family.

The eldest girl, Mary, was already nineteen. Mr. Thompson figured out that she had long since more than earned her keep by sewing clothes. Mary's mode of life differed little from that of the other native girls in Loren. She shared the same interests, had the same thoughts and spoke only Chukchi. Her European cast of features, however, with her large black eyes fringed with long eyelashes gave her a very attractive appearance. Mr. Thompson gave her more of his attention than he did his other children. He dressed her in the finest fur garments made of young marbled deerskins. Mary

was privileged to come into his room more often than the other children. Mr. Thompson was even somewhat proud of his daughter.

Mary's mother had often broached with her the subject of marriage. This was a thing they could only discuss in private, for Charlie would not hear of it. Rultyna could not understand the white man.

Did not the white man realize that a grown-up girl had to have a husband to be the father of her children? Was it not the dream of every girl to become a mother? Was not that what girls were born for? And why could not the white father and white husband understand that?

But Mr. Thompson had his own views on the subject. He never for a single moment entertained the idea of his daughter possibly presenting him with a native son-in-law.

Mary and little Ben of all the six children were indubitably his own offspring. The others were born of his marriage friends, and there was not a single feature of the white man in their appearance. Mr. Thompson realized that Mary would have to marry. But who was to be her husband? There was not an eligible man on the whole coast. Unless some sailor from one of the passing steamers would take her. But who would take a girl who didn't know the language to America? Besides, Mary did not have the faintest notion of how to behave in civilized society.

Mr. Thompson decided to keep a lookout for a likely candidate among the seamen who could be persuaded to marry Mary on the promise of taking over his business. He was nothing loath to marry her off to an old man, so long as he was white.

The philandering crews of the whalers and smuggler schooners would live with the native girls when they came ashore and desert them when their ships sailed

back. Mr. Thompson remembered how the crew of a wintering schooner had once married Chukchi girls and then abandoned them when the nautical season opened. The girls hurled themselves from the cliff and were killed.

Mary did not want a white husband. Even the best white man she knew—her father—evoked no good feelings in her. Such was the result of her mother's influence.

All Mary's girl friends in Loren and other encampments had already become real women and had children of their own. Mary had not yet known that happiness. And her future, too, was still obscure. Mary grew sullen and bad-tempered and disrespectful towards her father.

Her mother thought to herself: "Yarak is a good, strong hunter. It would be good if Mary married him, but then he is not white."

Twenty years' schooling in Charlie's home had taught Rultyna reticence and mute submission, and she knew better than to broach that subject with her husband. She always waited for Charlie to speak first.

But Charlie sat in his den, and what his thoughts were sitting there nobody could tell. Charlie was an unsociable man. His talks with the natives were strictly confined to business. At home he talked only to his documents. Rultyna, peeping through the crack, saw him turning over his papers and smiling to them, as though they were something better than human beings.

Rultyna conceived a hearty dislike for these papers and when she tidied up the room she would give them a vicious flick with her duster.

She preferred to see him casting looks on some young Chukchi woman. Charlie became human then. His eyes would light up with a spark of life and his silent lips open in a smile that revealed a mouthful of shining iron teeth.

He would invite the woman into his room and lock the door. The woman left him with a packet of chewing gum. Charlie was very kind-hearted. Sometimes he gave the woman a whole packet of cartridges as a gift for her husband.

White-faced infants were born in the Chukotsk settlements. They presented a striking contrast to the other children, but they enjoyed the great love and affection of their parents and everyone else in the settlement. People rejoiced at the birth of every new child and did not bother their heads about whose it was. What did it matter, so long as the child grew up to be a hunter and a real man?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

A pestilence had struck the coast. Some extremely malevolent spirit, men said, was haunting the Kamenel settlement. People dropped dead before each other's eyes. They had no strength to drag their feet along and froze to death in the unheated yarangs. Even the shamans froze to death.

Everybody in the yarang had died. Only one little boy was left—Yarak. Terrified, he had run away to a neighbour's yarang. Here, too, people lay stiff and cold, like stones. He called and called but no one answered him. Terror seized him. He ran from yarang to yarang, but everywhere people were silent.

Yarak wandered down by the seashore, not knowing where he was going. He stumbled on, munching frozen seal meat. Eventually he was picked up by some hunters and taken to their encampment. But when the boy told his story the people took fright. He carried the evil spirit in him. They gave him food and told him to go away. And wherever he went people told him to go away at once.

Mr. Thompson was not afraid of the evil spirits and he took Yarak into his house. The boy grew up in Charlie's family, looked after the dogs and helped about the house. Later he went out hunting and trapping. Mr. Thompson was pleased with his adopted son.

One day, however, Mr. Thompson caught Mary looking at Yarak in a way he did not like. Mr. Thompson said:

"I have saved your life, Yarak! Now you have grown to be a real, strong man. I have sent you out with the whalers to help the white men. You have learned to work with skill. Henceforth you may live among the Chukchi, your own people. I shall tell Rynteu that you will live in his yarang. When I need you for work I shall send for you."

Yarak had not expected that. He had worked so well and tried so hard!

He stared at Charlie in bewilderment and faltered:

"Charlie, let me make a separate yarang and live in it together with Mary. I want to marry. . . ."

"Wha-at?!" roared Mr. Thompson. "You are mad. What was that you said, goddam you? Have you ever heard of the daughter of a white man marrying a savage like you? You fool! That will never be! Take your skins at once and clear out! Begone from my house! Don't you ever come near this house again. Such is the law of the white man."

Yarak took his reindeer skins and went to Rynteu's yarang.

"What white man's law is that?" mused Yarak. "For three summers Charlie sent me to hunt whales with the white men. I have learned to speak their language but I never heard of such a law. The ship's cook himself told me: 'You marry Charlie's daughter, she is a fine girl!' Every white man makes his own law. What strange people!"

Yarak stood for a long time in the passage of Rynteu's yarang before he could summon up courage to go in. It was a disgrace for a man to be driven out. People might laugh at him. Yarak hesitated long before he gave the cough that would announce his presence. He wondered whether he had not better cut his throat. Yarak groaned in anguish.

The head of Rynteu was thrust out of the polog.

"Come in, Yarak, come in!" said the host warmly.

"Rynteu, Charlie has driven me out! He sent me to stay with you."

"Good. Stay here. There is plenty of room. We shall receive the trading men together. It is jolly here. You know yourself that my yarang is the receptacle of all the news along the coast."

Old Rynteu with all his chattels belonged lock, stock, and barrel to Mr. Thompson. He had been living under Charlie's wing for nearly twenty years. Rynteu's wife had paid frequent calls on Charlie. How many gifts she had brought back from him! And Rynteu himself Charlie had presented with a rifle. O, how happy Rynteu had been! For not everyone got such gifts!

Rynteu appreciated Charlie's kindness and would never forget it.

Hunters and trappers came often to Charlie to trade even from places where the merchant Brukhanov kept his trading yarang. And they always put up in Rynteu's yarang. Rynteu took care to make a stock of food in the summer for the traders' dogs. He spent all his time hunting. Charlie, too, used to buy some extra meat in the summer and dump it in Rynteu's meat hole. One needed a lot of food for the dogs over the winter. So Rynteu lived and worked for Charlie.

He had had a large family, but they had all died, except one daughter who kept house for him.

So when Yarak came to his yarang with his sleeping skins Rynteu was overjoyed. And no wonder! Was not Yarak a strong, healthy young man? Indeed, Rynteu was nothing loath to have him for a son-in-law.

Rynteu fussed around him and did his best to please him.

"Why is there sorrow on your brow, Yarak?"

"Hold your peace, Rynteu, if you do not want me to give you a good hiding."

"Oh!" said Rynteu, surprised. "Very well. By all means I shall hold my peace."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Mr. Thompson was so deeply preoccupied with his plans of warfare against the North Co. that he forgot his usual after-coffee constitutional which consisted of four walks between his house and the beach. It was already noon, but Mr. Thompson had not yet made his appearance.

Worried by her husband's peculiar behaviour Rulty-na came into his room and said quietly:

"Charlie, many men have arrived to do trade."

Mr. Thompson stared out of the window. He commanded, without turning his head:

"Fix up a tea for them in Rynteu's yarang. Give them some biscuits, but not too many, just enough to bait them. The quarry does not need much meat to get it caught in the trap."

Mr. Thompson dressed and went out.

In passing the anteroom in which his family lived he noticed a pair of men's torbazes protruding from under the skin curtain. Mr. Thompson went up closer, gave the torbazes a kick and demanded sternly:

"Whose legs are these?"

The curtain stirred and the smiling face of Yarak looked out.

Mr. Thompson flew into a rage.

"You goddam son of a bitch! Did I not warn you to keep away from my house?"

Mr. Thompson's eyes fairly popped out of his head. His red nose went blue and he foamed at the mouth.

Yarak, who was in a recumbent attitude, looked up and asked in surprise:

"But why, Charlie?"

Throwing restraint to the winds Mr. Thompson seized Yarak by the leg and dragged him across the floor to the outer door. Gnashing his metal teeth he roared:

"Get out!"

Yarak rose slowly to his feet, smiled wryly and walked away, smarting under a deep sense of wrong.

Mary's head looked out from under the fur curtain. Her eyes blazed like those of an enraged wolverine. On meeting her father's gaze she jerked the curtain down with a violent gesture.

Mr. Thompson, breathing heavily, went back into his room, and sank limply into his rocking chair weak with emotion. He filled his pipe and began puffing at it nervously.

"That was carrying it a bit too far. It isn't advisable to fall foul of people, particularly at this time!"

Chiding himself for a hasty temper Mr. Thompson decided to make amends somehow.

He called Mary, but no one answered.

"Ben!" shouted Charlie.

A little boy came running into the room. He was dressed in rich fur garments and his parka was trimmed with white fox. Dark-haired, with regular features, the boy stopped in the doorway and waited for his father to speak.

"Come here, my boy!" Charlie said kindly.

Ben went up to his father and stood beside the rocking chair. Mr. Thompson put his arm around him and asked:

"Has Mary gone out?"

"No, she is sitting in the polog."

"Then why did she not come? I called her."

"She doesn't want to."

There was a pause. Mr. Thompson was lost in thought. Never before had anyone disobeyed his commands. He heaved a sigh. Perhaps she was right?

"Ben," he said, "pass me that album."

Mr. Thompson turned over the photographs and came to one of himself taken in Norway when he was a child. He sat gazing at it.

"Look, Ben. That's you, isn't it?"

The boy looked at the photograph, glanced at himself in the mirror and smiled.

"Ben, would you like to go to America? Go away from here altogether?"

"No!" Ben said in a tone of finality and shook his head.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The hunters and trappers stood in a throng around Charlie's store waiting impatiently for the trading to begin. They had been waiting a long time and Charlie was very late. Maybe Charlie was not well?

Yarak not wishing to dampen the spirits of the traders said nothing about the change that had taken place in his life. He had strictly forbidden Rynteu to mention a word about Charlie having driven him out. He was ashamed that men should hear of his humiliation. He would try first to get to the bottom of the white man's laws himself.

To conceal the wrong that Charlie had done him from men's eyes Yarak forced himself to be cheerful. He

mingled with the crowd of hunters and trappers and took part in their conversation.

Vaamcho related the story of his encounter with a white bear the skin of which he had barely managed to bring down. Men exchanged items of news and swapped dogs.

Nearby a group of young men started a wrestling bout on the snow. Their heated bodies, stripped to the waist, steamed in the cold air.

A powerful athlete stepped out of the crowd, threw off his parka and rubbing his hands with a challenging air strutted up and down before the men. He walked twice round the crowd but no one seemed desirous of trying a tussle with him.

The lad cried mockingly:

"Well? Are there no more strong men left here? Look you, not a single man with guts in all this crowd! What will the girls think?"

"I think I am just in the right mood to teach that braggart a lesson!" Yarak said to himself.

He tore off his parka, stepped into the circle and cried with a smile:

"Here's one willing!"

"Throw off the white man's cloth shirt. It will be in your way."

Yarak took off his shirt and advanced slowly towards his opponent.

"Oho, even the girls have flocked up!" said somebody in the crowd. "Oh, those girls! They are always a cause of joy or great shame. I think this bout is worth watching."

The crowd formed a ring round the wrestlers. Small boys in fur garments wriggled their way through to the front.

The contestants stepped round and round for a long while locked in each other's embrace, but without exert-

ing their strength. They seemed to be taking stock of each other's supple bodies. Suddenly Yarak raised his arm and fetched his opponent a powerful blow on the neck with the palm of his hand. There was a resounding noise as of an oar smacking the water. At the same instant the other seized Yarak's leg below the knee and both bodies came down in a crash. They sprang to their feet in the twinkling of an eye and stood facing each other again.

At the height of the struggle Charlie's voice was suddenly heard:

"Hullo!"

Diverted by the shout the two wrestlers tripped over onto the snow amid the hearty laughter of the spectators.

"A box of tobacco to the strongest!" shouted Charlie, who had not recognized Yarak.

The wrestlers came to grips fiercely. Their eyes were bloodshot. Suddenly Yarak swung his opponent off his feet, threw him to the ground and laid him on his back amid the wild cheers of the crowd.

Yarak sat triumphantly astride his defeated opponent. It was only then that Mr. Thompson noticed who the victor was.

"All right! The tobacco is not wasted! At least my man got it!" he thought, trying to smother his vexation.

They all trooped off to the store. Mr. Thompson took down a two-pound box of fragrant plug tobacco and solemnly presented it to the victor.

Yarak accepted the gift and looked at Charlie a trifle disconcerted. It was difficult to understand the white man. Only a short time ago Charlie had dragged him out by the leg like a dead dog and now he had given him a whole box of tobacco.

"We shall trade later on," cried Mr. Thompson cheerfully. "First let us drink tea."

Charlie's gay mood communicated itself to all the

hunters. Everybody could see that Charlie was in an unusually good humour today.

The hunters had already drunk tea in Rynteu's yarang, but who would say nay to a cup of tea in Charlie's own house? No one! Not even if a man were filled with water up to the very neck.

"Mary, treat the guests to tea, and plenty of it!" cried Mr. Thompson.

This convivial mood of Mr. Thompson's pleased Mary and her mother greatly. They lost no time in bringing in the tea things and a huge kettle with a strong brew of tea.

The hunters sat in a semi-circle, munching soda crackers and sipping hot tea and speaking of their host in high terms.

"Charlie's a good fellow!"

"Yes, a very good fellow!"

One box of biscuits was dispatched in less than no time and Charlie ordered another box to be brought in.

"Let's have more kav-kav! Plenty of kav-kav!" shouted Charlie.

Rultyna and Mary served the guests with pleasure. Indeed, who would not be delighted to treat people in one's house properly, treat them until they were drenched with tea and their bellies waxed big!

Rultyna was now definitely convinced that her white husband had been trafficking with the evil spirits during the night. It was they who had turned his mind topsy-turvy. In his right mind he would have scolded her for every extra lump of sugar and every biscuit. O, she knew that only too well.

"Your belly is only fit for stuffing with rubbish and not for wasting good biscuits on," Charlie always used to tell her. She could not for the life of her understand what had come over him now.

After a copious tea the bartering began. Vaamcho was first to open business. He said to Mr. Thompson:



"Charlie, I have a polar bear lying in my sledge. A very big skin. Shall I bring it in?"

"No, don't. We shall look at it outside. It is crowded in here and not light enough."

The hunters swarmed into the street. Men lent Vaamcho an eager hand in laying out the enormous skin. It was the unanimous opinion that the skin was a splendid one.

Mr. Thompson wiped his glasses, dropped heavily to his knees, and crawled over the thick hair of the bear-skin on all fours. He tugged the hair in many places but it held firm. There was not a single flaw in the skin. The pile was even and snow-white. Mr. Thompson measured the skin which was fourteen feet from tail to ears. He ordered it to be rolled up and went towards his store.

At that moment a dog-team swept into view on the hillside. It was coming down at great speed, and men immediately recognized it as Alitet's. Mr. Thompson stopped. Alitet interested him more than Vaamcho's bearskin, good as it was.

Alitet's team dashed up to Charlie's house with a loud barking. The dogs charged headlong into another team which some hunter from a distant settlement had left lying near the house. Instantly there arose a yelping *mélée* of fighting dogs, flashing fangs and flying tufts. In the space of a second Alitet's hounds had torn one of the dogs to pieces.

Some eight men seized Alitet's dogs by their harness and it was all they could do to drag off the maddened beasts.

The owner of the dog-team went up to Alitet and said:

"Why did you loose your dogs on my team, Alitet?"

"Why did you place them in my way? Now you'll know next time!" Alitet said insolently.

"Yes, I dare say I shall," acquiesced the hunter.

Catching sight of Mr. Thompson in the crowd Alitet turned his back on the hunter and strode over to him with a dignified air, the gee pole in his hand. He took off his deerskin mitten and shook hands with Charlie.

"Come into the house, Alitet," said Mr. Thompson. "I have something important to discuss with you."

Alitet shouted in the direction of his sledge:

"Tygrena!"

"Never mind the woman just now," said Charlie. "Don't you know that a woman should be kept out of sight when men discuss business?"

"But Charlie, this is my second wife—the one you were interested in. That is why I took her with me."

"Not now, not now!" Mr. Thompson said crossly with a gesture of protest.

"Charlie, I do not want her to meet Aye," said Alitet in an undertone. "He is her former plighted husband. I hear that he has come down, too, from the mountains. You know yourself what little sense women have. She will go off like an untethered dog—then go and look for her."

"You need not worry. Aye has not finished his bargain with me yet."

Tygrena came up to the men and stood staring in silence at Charlie whom she knew by hearsay.

Charlie broke into English:

"Not a bad looking gal that! Okay, lady!" and he patted Tygrena on the back.

Charlie's unintelligible muttering reminded Tygrena of the grunting of a walrus. She tittered into the sleeve of her handsome parka.

"Our women like white men," said Alitet ingratiatingly.

Mr. Thompson put his arm round Tygrena and drew her to him with a loud laugh.

"You take a stroll in the meantime, Tygrena!" he said, and taking Alitet by his girdle he led him into the house.

Mr. Thompson, on entering the room, hastily closed the door and threw off his jacket.

"Alitet, there is important business! Sit down on that chair. Do you want to drink some firewater?"

"Very much. I have not seen it for a long time. I have almost forgotten how it smells."

There was a pleasant gurgling sound of whisky being poured into cups. They tossed it off. Alitet stroked his belly and said:

"That was good! Pour out some more!"

"No sir!" said Mr. Thompson. "When night comes we shall drink some more, but now we have to discuss important things. Don't you know that a man must keep his brains clear when he has business on his mind? I have great news."

Alitet wiped the inside of the cup and licked the drops of firewater off his fingers.

The room was hot and stuffy. Alitet undid his belt and took off his parka. Mr. Thompson regarded his sweaty body with disgust. He brought out a checked shirt and said:

"Put that on, Alitet! It isn't good to sit without a shirt on."

The idea struck Alitet as funny, but he slipped the shirt on and wriggled uncomfortably. The cloth garment restricted his movements and tickled his skin. How could one compare it to the shirt made of the soft and silky skin of the young reindeer! Still, one had to put up with it. Charlie was the master here. He had his own law.

Mr. Thompson, who had been gazing searchingly at Alitet's face, suddenly demanded:

"Alitet, who has made a big trader out of you?"

Alitet digested this for a little while, then said briefly and somewhat irresolutely:

"You."

"Come, don't be afraid. I am not going to cheat you.

I want you to become a rich man. I am your old friend, am I not?"

Alitet, visibly relieved, answered with better grace:

"Yes, Charlie! You say the truth. And you and I are not ordinary friends. We are marriage friends. That is why I have brought Tygrena."

"But most important of all, Alitet, is that we are trading friends, friends in the fur-buying business. Those two hundred and twenty white foxes which you have lying in your sledge I shall not buy from you. Take them back home."

Alitet started up. His ferret eyes in their narrow slits sharpened.

"No, no, don't be scared," said Mr. Thompson smiling. "I want you to trade with the white captain yourself when the schooner arrives this summer. You will receive very many goods from such trading."

"What was Charlie saying?" Alitet wondered. "What strange things was he saying!" Alitet was bewildered. He stammered, almost in a whisper:

"Charlie, none of the fox skins lying in my sledge have been paid for. I have called on many hunters and trappers in the tundra, but not one of them received a plug of tobacco, or a knife or a thimble from me. They are waiting to be paid. I have to buy goods from you for these skins."

"I know. You will take the fox skins back and I will give you all the goods you need on credit. You will carry the goods round to the hunters and let them have them on credit. It will be all right. They will pay back in furs next year."

"They will sure pay back. I myself will take everything they have."

"That's right. We must buy up at once, in advance, all the furs they will have next year. Do you understand, Alitet?"

"Alitet understands. All the pelts will come to me."

"But you must listen carefully and do as I tell you. You can see yourself that I am doing my best for you. I shall teach you how to trade with the American schooner and barter with the hunters and trappers of the tundra and the coast. O, this is something I never told you before! In the summer, when the schooner comes to me, I shall tell the captain that you have a lot of fur, and he is sure to make a call on you. We shall do business together, like trading brothers."

Alitet sat listening with a fascinated stare, like a dog expecting a bit of meat.

"How good that I brought Tygrena!" thought Alitet. "He has never been so kind. He is very generous."

"Well, Alitet, do you understand what has to be done?"

"Alitet understands everything. You don't know Alitet!" he answered importantly.

"Okay then! Now we can drink as much firewater as we want and have a good time with the women."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Tygrena went back to the sledge. Gazing with curiosity at the house and store of Charlie Red Nose she thought: "Why has Alitet brought me here?"

The memory of the fat white man with the bits of glass over his eyes brought a smile to her face. "What funny grunting noises he made when he spoke!"

Old Rynteu came up to the sledge.

"Woman," he said, addressing Tygrena, "why do you sit here and not go into my yarang? In Rynteu's yarang there is always tea for the guests and food for the dogs. Charlie even allows a little sugar for visitors."

Tygrena took a fancy to the old man. His face was kind and his words gentle.

Just then Tygrena caught sight of Vaamcho who was busy with his bearskin. Her face lit up and she said to Rynteu:

"You drive the sledge down. I will come later." And she ran up to Vaamcho.

"What are you doing with Bruin, Vaamcho?"

"I wanted to sell it, but you and Alitet interrupted. I did not finish the deal. Now I shall have to take it back. Alitet has spoilt Charlie's mood."

"Vaamcho, he drove the dogs furiously all the way. Like a man who hurries to get ashore from the ice fields. And as soon as he saw the Merican he dropped everything. He dropped the dogs. He never did that before. He never trusted them to anyone."

"Did you see Charlie, Tygrena? Men say he is Alitet's friend by wife."

Tygrena thought of the fat clumsy Tang and was silent.

"They are bad men, Tygrena! Wolves, both of them. Katam merkichkin!" he swore.

Tygrena smiled and said archly:

"O, Vaamcho, you are becoming brave!"

Vaamcho reddened and changed the subject.

"There is some more news. Aye is here. He has come to sell fox skins for his master Yatkhyrgyn."

Tygrena was all ears.

"He asked about you. He has become a herdsman in Yatkhyrgyn's reindeer herds. He has given up the coast. He says it is lonely on the coast, he feels too ashamed to live there. He gave his rifle away to Yatkhyrgyn.

"Perhaps Aye wants to work for a wife. Yatkhyrgyn has many girls," said Tygrena.

"I don't know," answered Vaamcho.

"Where is Aye?"

"Aye is in Rynteu's yarang. He is telling the news. He hasn't come out all day. Tygrena, do you not wish

to go to Rynteu's yarang? His yarang is the source of all the news. A man filled with news is a welcome guest everywhere."

"I do not know where to go, Vaamcho. I have lost my way entirely."

Rynteu's yarang presented a scene of great animation. Aye was lying on a couch of skins with his hands clasped behind his head and speaking to an interested audience:

"... When I came to Yatkhyrgyn he asked me: 'Have you left the coast for good? Why did you leave? Is it bad there?'

"'Yes,' I said, 'it's bad. Miserable. Alitet took my bride from me. My hands are no longer willing to work.'

"'Aha!' said Yatkhyrgyn. 'I do not need hands. I need legs for my herds. If you run well and take good care of my herds you will get a juicy piece to eat. We'll find a girl for you as well.'

"Just then the women brought in rich boiled meat.

"'Try some,' said Yatkhyrgyn.

"I began to eat.

"'Ohol' he said. 'You are a ravenous eater, I see. I trust you will prove as good a herder. If not I'll throw you out!'

"So I went to the herd. You just try to keep good watch on the reindeer! Try to keep them grazing all the time and not allow them to lie down. Try to keep them nibbling at the moss so that they grow fat. Oh, how hard it is! When there's a snowstorm raging you do not sleep for guarding against the wolves. You run about like a wolf yourself. In fine weather you are busy setting traps to catch foxes.

"Then Yatkhyrgyn himself visited the herd, arriving on a sledge team of beautiful white reindeer.

"'Aye,' he said, 'I see you are as good a herdsman as you are ravenous an eater. You have kept the herd safe

and trapped foxes as well. Here, pass them over. Tut-tut, my eyes have never seen their likes. They must be taken direct to Charlie Red Nose,' he said, 'and bartered for goods, for Alitet will count them as ordinary pelts—he will say: one tail, two tails, three tails. . . . Take a nap until sunrise under the belly of a reindeer and then go down to the trading yarang. Put on my snowshoes. They are strong and the trail is long. You will come back and tend my herds again. In three years I shall give you a good girl.'

"But I don't need any girl of his," went on Aye. "My heart longed for the coast. My eyes craved for the sight of the coast dwellers. I wanted to hear their speech. It is cheerful on the coast. People everywhere, but there only reindeer. And so I went. After I had walked two days I saw a campfire burning in Hare's Trail valley. There beside it I saw a tent and a dog-team. I ran up, and whom should I see but a Russian. He had come from far away and was three months on the trail. He was travelling to the Chukotsk headland. Called himself a chief. But whoever saw a chief without a beard! He asked me:

"'Is it far to the Chukotsk headland?'

"'No,' I said, 'it's near. One day's dog trail.'

"'Oh, only one day? In that case my dogs can rest a little longer. Sit down,' he says. 'Would you like some tea?'

"He had everything—sugar, and biscuits, and meat in iron tins and tobacco. Maybe he was a chief after all? We sat up all night, talking. He asked me questions about everything. My throat got dry from talking. But he kept on asking me questions. Then he began talking himself. He spoke such things that my head got dazed and muddled. He said that out there on the Mainland of the Russians there had been a war. Remember, we heard rumours about it? The rich men were fighting

the poor. All the rich men have been driven out and common folk like you and me have become chiefs and make their own law. He spoke about Charlie and Alitet too. He said the Merican will be driven off the coast. Alitet too.

"‘We shall give you the job of trading,’ he said.”
Aye laughed.

"He’s no chief—he’s too young! He says there will soon be a new law on the Chukotsk headland, too, and that law will pass down the whole coast and all through the tundra. I don’t suppose he knew what he was talking about...."

Silence reigned in the yarang. Men had never heard such skilfully spun tales in this yarang before. Where had Aye learned the art of such masterly storytelling? Was it not spirits he encountered in Hare’s Trail valley? Who knows whom a man might meet on the lonely trail?

"What happened to the Russian?" someone enquired.

"He gave me a lift and then rode off to the Chukotsk headland. I said to him, ‘You will not be able to get through this way. The mountains bar the path. There is a gorge there, but you will not be able to find it.’ ‘Oh, I’ll get through,’ he says. A brave man! He had a paper in his pocket with all the rivers and the coast line drawn on it. ‘Well, just as you like,’ I said. He shook me a long time by the hand and said:

"‘Good-bye, Aye! We shall meet again soon. You and I will be making a new law here. We shall change life....’ A queer man! Change life! It is not easy to change the yarang, leave alone life. I can’t make the man out."

"It wasn’t a man, it was a spirit," said an old hunter in a tone of conviction.

Yarak drew up to Aye and asked:

"Did he bring the law of the white men?"

"I don't know," answered Aye evasively.

"You cannot believe the Tangs. I saw many of them on the American whalers," said Yarak. "They are great liars and cheats. You can never understand them. Their law is like the wind—it blows all ways. And what was his name, this Russian's?"

"Andrei," answered Aye. "He has kind eyes, they look as though they were telling the truth."

Vaamcho crawled into the polog followed by Tygrena. The latter slipped the handsome parka from her shoulders and squatted by the entrance.

"Kakomei, Tygrena!" cried Aye delightedly, rising on one knee. "Have you become a trader? Have you begun visiting trading yarangs?"

Tygrena looked at Aye in silence.

"Go on with your story, Aye!" came cries from all sides.

"You tell very interesting stories."

"You have learned good fairy tales in the tundra."

"Tell us some more about the beardless one."

Vaamcho leaned over to his neighbour and asked in a low voice:

"What was Aye talking about?"

"Interesting news. Very interesting. I never heard such news before."

"Go on, Aye! Why have you stopped?" urged Vaamcho.

But the sight of Tygrena seemed to have deprived Aye of the power of speech. He wanted to ask Tygrena how she lived, what she thought, but he was ashamed to do so in front of all these people. They all knew that Alitet had taken Tygrena away from him. They might begin to make fun of him. It were better if Tygrena had not come with all these men here. Aye lit up his pipe in silence. It was not good to be a man who is pitied. Nevertheless he moved up to where Tygrena was sitting.

A woman's head was thrust into the polog.

"Tygrena," she said, "Alitet has asked for you."

Tygrena herself was glad of the excuse to get away from all these curious eyes. She drew up her fur parka and crept out silently.

"Why have you let your wife go, Aye?" said a young hunter with a sneer.

Yarak threw him an angry look. It seemed to him that the taunt was meant for him.

"It's good to see a man's wife led away under his nose," continued the wit.

Yarak clenched his teeth and struck the scoffer a blow in the face.

The man slunk into a corner clutching his nose. Silence fell on the yarang. Aye threw his parka over his shoulders and crawled out.

No one understood and sympathized with Aye as much as Yarak. Both had striven in vain to possess a family of their own. And what hunter is considered a real man if he has no wife? A man without a wife was fair game for the jester.

Yarak hastened out after Aye, who walked towards the seashore. He caught up with him and they walked on together in silence as far as the pack ice.

The sun dipped behind the mountain. It was a still evening. Mr. Thompson's house stood out clearly in the near distance. A light went up in the little window and quickly disappeared behind the lowered blind.

"Merkichkin!" Yarak swore softly. "Charlie always does that when he has a woman in his room."

Aye stood kicking the pack ice. Now and then he stole a look at the white man's house.

"Yours is a poor life, Aye," said Yarak sympathetically. "So is mine. I wanted to marry Mary, but Charlie drove me out. He shouted at me. Then he pulled me out by the leg. I was terribly ashamed. Like I was a weak, helpless man. Every white man has his own law."

"Charlie pulled you by the leg, and Alitét pulls me all the time by the heart. Pulls it out as you would the heart from a reindeer carcass. Ai, it hurts! I wanted to shoot myself. . . . But now . . . that Russian has told me so many things. . . . I keep on thinking and thinking all the time. I am afraid I will go mad with all this thinking. I can't understand half the things he was talking about. Much too much talking for one night. Do you know what he told me, Yarak? He told me that Alitét would not be such a rich man now. The new law will put him quite low."

"He is a liar, Aye. All the white men are alike. Their tongues wag about in their mouths like a rag in the wind. I saw many of them on the American whaleboats."

"But that Russian's eyes looked kind. They were good, truthful eyes. He will drive the Merican off the coast too."

Yarak smiled wryly and said:

"Who can drive Charlie away? He has a lot of goods, he is a strong man. He will drink firewater with the Russians and laugh. They have one and the same law. I know, I have seen when the Russian merchant, Pete Brukhanov, visited Charlie."

"No, Yarak! This man is different. He is young, but he speaks like an old man. Quietly. He says he has brought many new laws with him. And a law for marriage too. So he said."

Vaamcho appeared from behind an ice pack.

"Why have the hunters come out to the ice without a rifle?" he said with a smile.

The lads laughed.

"It is a bad day today," Vaamcho continued. "I have brought a good skin of the white bear but did not succeed in trading it. Charlie Red Nose went away. He dropped everything and went off with Alitét for the whole day. Trading is bad when Alitét is here. He brought Tygrena for Charlie. They called her to him."

"Ah, Vaamcho, speak no more! A great anger is entering my heart!" cried Aye.

"There is anger in every man's heart. Only your anger, Aye, is hidden away deep."

"Ah!" groaned Aye and he bit his hand until it bled.

"I know now what Charlie will do," went on Yarak. "He will pour firewater down Tygrena's throat. She will burn her throat and become weak and dizzy and helpless as a child. He always does that with women.

A feeling of humiliation and harsh resentment swept over Aye. He made a sudden dash towards Charlie's house. The door of the room was locked.

"From whom have you shut yourself in—from the white bear?" shouted Aye, shaking the door.

He heard the tipsy voice of Tygrena. She was singing.

In a fit of fury Aye wrenched the door open and rushed into Charlie's room.

"You goddam son of a bitch!" roared Mr. Thompson. "What do you mean by breaking into my house? Did I call you? Get out! Get out before I break your neck!"

Aye hurled himself on Charlie and seized him by the throat. The attack was so sudden and violent that Charlie lost his balance and fell onto the rocking chair. Aye tightened his grip on his throat. Beneath the weight of the two struggling men the chair toppled over backwards and sent them sprawling on the floor. The huge horn of the overturned gramophone dropped with a crash. Charlie grew purple in the face.

At that moment Alitet staggered drunkenly into the room. He threw himself on Aye and dragged him off. Aye wrenched himself free, leapt on the table and kicked the lamp onto the floor. Amid the ensuing darkness and confusion he slipped out of the house.

Alitet, hopping about trying to get into his deerskin trousers, screamed:

"Where's my rifle? Quick! I'll shoot that pup on the spot!"

But Aye was already on the hillside, making for the settlement.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The sun beat down. The air was clear and translucent. The dazzling whiteness of the snow and the blazing sunshine made the eyes smart. Floundering in the soft snow, the dog-team struggled on with lolling tongues. Alongside the sledge, sinking at every step into the snow, walked Andrei Zhukov. All around lay rolling expanses of snow-clad hills and valleys. There was not a sign of life anywhere. . . .

Andrei Zhukov, a student of the geographical faculty of the Petrograd University, had arrived in Petropavlovsk-on-Kamchatka in the autumn of 1922. Here he had readily accepted the proposal of the Gubernia Revcom* to go down to the Arctic coast by sledge trail. And so he had set out in the height of the winter on a tour of inspection of the ancient Russian lands of Chukotsk.

An old professor at the university who had spent some years in exile in this region had imparted to Andrei Zhukov his entire Chukchi vocabulary. This had stood him in good stead. During his three months' journey by dog sledge Andrei had met not a few of the local inhabitants of whom he had only read about in books and ethnological studies.

Now spring had set in and his long trail was drawing to a close. Kamchatka and the Koryak country lay

* Revolutionary Committee—local executive authorities in the first period after the Revolution.—*Trans.*

far behind him and he had already set foot on the Chukotsk tundra.

Andrei stopped the team. "Where can that gorge be of which the reindeer herdsman was telling me?" thought Andrei as he scanned the endless chain of mountain ridges.

There were no tracks in the snow. Not a speck or a blade of grass. A reindeer or even a hare would be a welcome sight. He was running short of food for the dogs too. The strain was beginning to tell on the underfed animals.

"No, I'll have to give up the idea of making the short cut. Let the geese take it if they want!"

Andrei sat down in the sledge and steered for the coast. The dogs, as though guessing their master's design, pushed on at a livelier pace. The hilly landscape lay wrapped in an unearthly stillness.

Suddenly Andrei felt a sharp twinge of pain in his eyes. He covered them with his hand, so sharp the pain was. After a lengthy time he drew his hand away and suddenly discovered that he could see nothing. It was as though a dark film had been drawn over his eyes.

Andrei stopped the dogs. He rubbed his eyes and realized with a shock that he had gone blind. He lay down on the sledge listening to the stillness that seemed to engulf him from all sides and fighting back a sense of panic.

Finally, he decided to trust himself to the instinct of the dogs. Sitting up in the sledge he cried to the lead dog:

"Forward, Vernyl!"

And the dogs took off. After running on for a long time at an even pace the dogs suddenly broke into a canter.



"What is this?" thought Andrei and brought the sledge to a stop with his gee pole, deciding that the dogs had picked up some trail.

He groped about in the snow and found a track made by a sledge that had passed that way. Andrei drew a breath of relief. That meant there was human habitation not far away.

The dogs went off again at a spanking rate. But the wind no longer blew in Andrei's face.

"The wind has veered," thought Andrei.

He took his hat off the better to determine the direction of the wind, when suddenly he heard someone shout his name:

"Andrei!"

"Am I bewitched, or what?" thought Andrei. "Who on earth could call me by name in this wilderness of snow?"

He stopped the team and listened tensely, turning his head from side to side.

The call being repeated Andrei shouted at the top of his voice:

"Aho-oy!"

A man ran noiselessly up to the sledge and said, gasping for breath:

"Andrei, is it you?"

Andrei started. He spun round at the sound of the voice and asked sharply:

"Who is that?"

"It is I, Aye. Have you forgotten me, Andrei?"

"Aye!" exclaimed Andrei with a shout of joy and rushed towards the voice.

Hugging Aye in his embrace as though he feared the apparition might disappear, Andrei said:

"My eyes have gone bad. I cannot see."

"That often happens when there is a big sun. You must put a reindeer skin or something on your eyes.

Something dark. It will soon pass. Tomorrow you will be all right."

"Aye, cut a piece off my black bag."

Aye turned the bag about in his hands and said with a sigh:

"It is a pity to cut such a good bag."

"Never mind that, Aye! Come on, cut a piece off!"

Aye cut off a strip and tied it over Andrei's eyes.

"Well, my friend," said Andrei, "I think we can spend the night here—what do you say? You are not in a hurry to get anywhere?"

"No," answered Aye.

"Then put up the tent. We shall have some tea. And something to eat. Aye, what is this trail along which I have been riding?"

"It is your own trail," replied Aye. "I have already looked at it. You were going round and round. You would still be going round. Dogs will never swerve unless a man makes them."

They were soon comfortably ensconced in the tent.

"Andrei, the snow in the kettle has become water. The bandage on your eyes must be made wet. It is better so."

"All right, Aye, go ahead! You know what's the right thing to do."

Aye moistened and wrung out the bandage and tied it over Andrei's eyes again.

"Andrei, are you really a chief?"

Zhukov smiled.

"Yes, I am. But I am not the big chief. The big chief will come in the summer when the steamer arrives. He sent me on ahead."

"A-ah!" said Aye. Then, after a pause: "Ai, it's bad for me, Andrei! I am in trouble. They will no doubt shoot me down like a hare."

"Who is going to shoot you?"

The hills were wrapped in silence. A light night frost penetrated the tent. It was time to go to sleep, but Aye's heart was full and he unburdened it to Andrei, telling him of what happened at Charlie Red Nose's trading yarang, of the reason why Alitet wanted to shoot him, of Tygrena and of many other things.

The dogs dozed peacefully outside. The sun went down and reappeared in a welter of crimson.

"Do not worry, Aye! You have nothing to fear. Nobody will dare touch you. I promise you that. You will soon see it for yourself. And now let us take a little sleep and drive down to the coast together."

Aye did not go to sleep. He was a herdsman, and herdsmen were used to going without sleep for two or three nights running. Aye walked around the tent, then examined the sledge in a businesslike manner and tightened the thongs that had come loose. Then he sat down and stared long at the wooden seat of the sledge. Aye was thinking. At length he drew out his knife and cut off a slat from the board of the seat. He swiftly cut out two discs, drilled little holes in them with the point of his blade, tied them together with a slender thong and put them on his nose.

The result of his handiwork elicited a grunt of satisfaction.

Hearing Andrei's voice calling him Aye ran to the tent.

"Aye, I can see you now. That's good!"

"And I have made you a pair of lookers. Our people in the hills who have weak eyes always wear them," said Aye, placing the spectacles on his nose.

Andrei burst out laughing.

"But, my dear fellow, you can't see through wood!"

"There are little holes in them. Quite enough to see.



You must not go about without lookers. The sun is shining strongly again."

Andrei put on the wooden spectacles and went outside.

"Why, they are wonderful! Wooden optics—fancy that! That was very clever of you, Aye! Splendid! Get the dogs up and let us be going."

"It will be bad for me to show myself on the coast, ai, very bad!" said Aye in tones of distress.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Aye took his seat in the sledge beside Andrei. He pointed out the way in harassed silence, brooding over his coming meeting with people on the coast.

At last he caught sight of the Loren settlement in the distance.

"Andrei, will you go to the trading yarang? To the white man? To Charlie? Perhaps I had better stay here?"

"Why should I be going to him? You and I will go to one of the hunter's yarangs."

"Are you afraid of Charlie?"

Andrei broke into a peal of laughter. The sound allayed Aye's fears and inspired him with sudden confidence in the powers of the young Russian chief.

Aye, with a new sense of elation, took over the reins from Andrei and drove the team down to Rynteu's yarang. A crowd quickly gathered round the sledge.

"Look! Aye has brought a white man with him!"

"That is him, the Russian chief," Aye whispered to his friend Vaamcho.

He then went back to Andrei who was sitting waiting in the sledge and said in the same low voice:

"Andrei, this is Vaamcho, of whom I have been telling you. It was his bait Alitet poured the lamp fat over by the Three Hills."

"Ah, Vaamcho! My greetings!" said Andrei warmly, and wrung the lad's hand as though he were an old friend.

Vaamcho was thrown into such confusion that he was at a loss for words. This was the first time in his life that a white man had shaken his hand.

"Go into the dwelling—I will unharness your dogs," he said at last when he had found his tongue.

Rynteu's yarang was still filled with hunters and trappers who were waiting for an opportunity to finish their bartering with Charlie Red Nose. The sudden appearance of the Russian chief of whom Aye had been telling them the previous day was like a waking dream. They eyed the newcomer with curiosity.

The Russian was a tall, sturdy-looking man, but terribly young and with nothing in his appearance that betokened a chief.

Aye pulled out a new reindeer skin and spread it out obligingly for Andrei to sit on. Andrei lay down on the skin, propped up by his elbow, and began filling his pipe.

"Let someone call Charlie here," he said.

The hunters exchanged amazed glances.

He must be mad, this Russian! Charlie had never climbed this hill on which the yarangs stood. Whoever heard of such a thing? Charlie would never comply and no one could make him!

"Tell him that the Russian chief wants to see him. He is to come at once," added Andrei sternly.

Oho, he must really be a chief if he speaks like that! But who will dare go to Charlie with such a message? Maybe Vaamcho will go? No, it would be more fitting for Rynteu, the master of the yarang, to carry such astonishing news. Besides, he was the oldest.

So great and staggering was the news that Rynteu, despite his age, ran all the way to Charlie's house without stopping for breath.

Meanwhile the hunters, all agog with excitement and curiosity, waited to see what would happen. And no wonder! So many events in one single second! Soon they would witness the meeting of two white men. The Russian had not even deigned to call on Charlie. O, that was a thing never before heard of! Something was bound to happen! Most astonishing of all was that the Russian had seemed to have made friends with Aye! He probably did not know that Aye was simply a herdsman and that he had very nearly strangled Charlie.

More keenly than anybody was Yarak interested in impending events. He considered himself an authority on white men.

In anticipation of Charlie's coming Aye for safety's sake moved up closer to Andrei.

Mr. Thompson was no less astounded by the news than Rynteu. The whole settlement was thrown into a turmoil. And though Charles Thompson, his throat swathed in bandages, felt pretty seedy after the previous night's dissipation, he nevertheless set out without a moment's delay.

He toiled up the hill puffing with exertion, and squeezed himself into the yarang considerably out of breath. His eyes travelled over the assembled company and alighting on the Russian he greeted him politely in Chukchi.

"Sit down, please," Andrei answered him in English.

"Oh, you speak English! May I know whom I have the honour of speaking to?"

"My name is Zhukov. You are Mr. Thompson?"

"Yes, Charles Thompson. I'm very glad, Mr. Zhukoff, to meet a civilized gentleman in these parts. I'm sur-

prised you didn't come straight down to my house. This here place I keep for the hunters and trappers who come down to trade. The air is none too wholesome and it's so primitive in here."

"Don't let that surprise you, Mr. Thompson. As a matter of fact I chose to come to this place instead of to your house as a matter of duty."

"That doesn't sound very courteous, Mr. Zhukoff."

"In my opinion, Mr. Thompson, courtesy required that you, as a foreigner, should make the first call on the official representative of new Russia."

Andrei Zhukov was talking to a real live American for the first time. Aye's experiences in Charlie's house had roused in Zhukov a feeling of aversion towards this unwelcome intruder from an alien land. He spoke to Mr. Thompson with unveiled asperity and deliberately adopted a heightened official tone.

"Are you a Bolshevik?" queried Mr. Thompson in a voice that registered surprise and a tinge of alarm.

"Yes, I am a Bolshevik."

Mr. Thompson's idea of a Bolshevik, gleaned from the American press, was of a ferocious-looking man with a knife in his mouth. This fair-haired young man with blue eyes who looked rather like a Norwegian and spoke such perfect English upset all his notions.

"A real Bolshevik?" he asked incredulously.

"Why, of course. I am the representative of the Kamchatka Provincial Revolutionary Committee, Mr. Thompson, and I have invited you here to discuss official business."

"Why, certainly Mr. Zhukoff, by all means. I am entirely at your disposal."

"I suppose you're aware, Mr. Thompson, that the representatives of the North Co. will be arriving here when the navigation season opens?"

"Oh, yes. I read about it in the papers."

"The North Co. is taking over the trade in this territory, and you will have to wind up business, Mr. Thompson."

"And what about Stevenson and Clark and Olson?" Mr. Thompson hastily threw in.

"The same applies to them."

"And Mr. Brukhanov and Mr. Karavayev, too?"

"Yes, all of you. The North Co. is organizing six large fur trading posts on the coast. The Soviet Government has granted this company the sole rights of conducting trade in this territory. You will have to wind up your affairs here, Mr. Thompson, and quit the coast."

Yarak craned his neck like a goose, anxious not to miss a single word. Yarak could hardly believe his ears. Everybody had thought Charlie Red Nose to be stuck to the coast like lichen to a rock, which no wind could shake loose. What he now heard left Yarak dumbfounded.

Clearly this beardless Russian was a chief after all. And what a powerful chief he must be to speak thus to Charlie?

"One more thing, Mr. Thompson," continued Andrei. "This has something to do with your private life here."

"Yes, Mr. Zhukoff—what is it?"

"I have heard, Mr. Thompson, that you are guilty of conduct that is most reprehensible in a gentleman of your age and not at all in keeping with civilized ethics."

Mr. Thompson breathed hard.

"I have in mind the rather unpleasant incident in which this man was involved in your house yesterday." Aye started at the touch of Andrei's hand on his shoulder. "This is worse than discourtesy, Mr. Thompson, don't you agree?"

A deep flush suffused Mr. Thompson's face, then left it bloodless. He said nothing.

"And you call yourself a civilized man after that—a representative of the cultured world?" said Andrei scornfully.

Mr. Thompson hung his head. This was perhaps the first time in twenty years that he had had his conduct brought home to him. The fact that this conversation was being carried on in the presence of the hunters, especially that of Yarak who knew sufficient English to be able to follow it, was all the more painful. Without raising his head he said quietly in Chukchi:

"Yarak, go out!"

Yarak unwillingly rose to his feet.

"No, you stay here, Yarak," said Andrei. "I need you."

Mr. Thompson sat motionless and silent. No one had ever seen him look so humbled as he did at that moment.

"That's all, Mr. Thompson. I think I have made myself clear?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, that's all I have to say. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," growled Mr. Thompson as he waddled ponderously towards the exit.

"The scoundrel!" muttered Andrei in Chukchi when he had gone.

The sun, having climbed to the top of the sky, was now on its downward path. Outside the hunters were gathered in an excited crowd, discussing this amazing news without end. Ai, ai, ai, what news this was! Something to tell to the people on the coast on their way home! The bearer of such news would certainly be a welcome guest in every yarang along the coast.

Yarak stood in the centre of the crowd, giving an enthusiastic though somewhat garbled account of what had passed between the white men. The sum and substance of the event, however, was clear to everybody.



The sun dipped earthwards, but men still stood around talking and talking. A night frost hardened the moist snow. Alitet had taken a hasty departure, and his sledge had long since disappeared behind the hill. Indeed, there was food for talk!

Andrei was served fresh seal liver. For company he had Aye, Vaamcho and Yarak.

They drew diffidently around Zhukov and fell to eating too.

"Andrei, what is Vaamcho to do with his bearskin now?" asked an emboldened Aye.

"Let him sell it to Charlie. He can go on trading until the summer."

"And what about me? Charlie Red Nose has not yet given me all the goods for the foxes I brought. The pelts are not mine. Yatkhyrgyn will scold me."

"Go to Charlie and get what is due. Or are you still afraid of Charlie, Aye?"

"No. I am no longer afraid of him. And Alitet has gone too. There is nothing to be afraid of!" cried Aye gaily.

Having finished his meal and drunk tea Andrei went outside closely followed by his new friends.

The lads had the dog-team harnessed for him in the twinkling of an eye. Busiest of all was Aye. Yarak still regarded the new white man with a lingering suspicion.

Andrei got out his wooden spectacles and put them on. Upon seeing this Yarak pulled out a pair of real goggles from under his parka and held them in silence to Andrei.

"Oh, splendid! How much do they cost?"

"Nothing," answered Yarak.

Andrei took out five rubles and gave them to Yarak.

"What is that for?" asked Yarak.

"Buy yourself another pair."

"Charlie does not sell anything for paper. He only barter pelts."

"You tell him I said he was to sell you a pair of glasses. That is Russian money and he is obliged to accept it."

The dogs strained at their traces, eager to be off. Andrei took his leave of the hunters.

"Well, my friends, good-bye! We shall soon meet again."

The Kamchadale team took off at a gallop.

"Did you hear what the Big Chief said, eh?" cried Vaamcho gazing after the retreating sledge. "He said 'friends!'"





PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE

CAPTAIN Harry Brown, with an Oregon briar gripped between his teeth, stood by the steering wheel of his schooner the *Polar Bear* as it cruised under easy sail off the coast of Alaska.

He was a heavy, squat-bodied man of about forty. The yellow oilskins which he wore made his face look younger than it was. Harry Brown's powerful, heavy hands were thrust into the pockets of his blue jeans. The latter, by the way, consisted entirely of red-stitched pockets bulging with a variety of contents. There were pockets everywhere—on the breast and on the legs, over the knees and across the captain's broad thighs. One would think that this garment served Harry Brown as a sort of auxiliary storehouse. The brass buttons flaunted an emblem rather unusual for nautical wear in the shape of a railway engine.

Harry Brown was a practical man of the sea, uncertified as master mariner for either high sea navigation or coasting service. But that did not prevent him from being a good seaman. He knew and loved the sea and undertook the dangerous voyages across the Arctic Ocean

on his *Polar Bear* with pleasure and ability. His ship, for all its innocent name, was neither more nor less than a smuggler.

The schooner's entire crew consisted of two men, besides the skipper—a hard-boiled strapping fellow of a steersman by the name of Mr. Harlow, and the easy-going good-tempered rascal Jim, who combined the duties of ship's engineer and cook. They were both prinked up in oilskins and blue jeans similar to those worn by the skipper, a fact which they prided themselves on as an unmistakable sign of the democracy that ruled the deck of their little 120-ton craft.

They all three stood at the wheel peering hard into the heavy pall of mist as their vessel, obedient to the skipper's hand, sneaked like a thief in the night through the strait off the coast of Alaska.

Strange things were happening in the world. Captain Brown many a bright sunny day had sailed past in full sight of the town of Nome where Mr. Kerry, the customs officer, had had his residence for many years. And every year, when navigation opened, they would meet like old friends:

"Hello, Mr. Brown!"

"Hello, Mr. Kerry!"

The urbanities over, Mr. Brown would head his ship for the islands, then coolly steer a straight course for the grim but rich shores of the Chukotsk Peninsula. So it had been.

"But things have changed lately. These fine traditions of the Arctic have been dished, gone up in smoke," as Captain Brown expressed it.

Mr. Kerry, for no apparent reason, unless it were some sort of high politics, suddenly took it into his head to stop smuggling schooners and turn them back. That was his affair, however. It didn't worry Harry Brown. He was so familiar with the strait and the shores of this

free-port smuggler's paradise that he could guide his *Polar Bear* blindfolded to them through the thickest fog under the nose of the customs officer.

The mist lifted just in time. Alaska now lay behind them. The Arctic sun shone forth in a blaze of golden glory and the rarefied floating blue ice shimmered with a soft, serene radiance. The ship nosed its way forward tacking amid the ice floes like a dog-team among the ice packs. The crew were in excellent spirits. They were out in the Arctic at last, amid the wide open spaces where it was so much easier to breathe than in those stuffy States.

The Russians were far away from here, busy with their revolution, and someone had to supply tobacco to the hunters and trappers of the coast where the beautiful white fox pelts were as thick as hops.

The merry crew of the *Polar Bear* felt very much at home in these waters. The pure bracing air and the pursuit of a profitable occupation were conducive of a healthy appetite.

Jim the cook took a lucky pot shot at a walrus that was dozing peacefully on an ice floe, jumped adroitly onto the ice, swiftly ripped open its belly and cut out the huge liver. Next he knocked the tusks out of its head with a mallet as a souvenir and the schooner resumed its way, gathering speed as it entered ice-free water.

Soon the *Polar Bear* cast anchor off a stretch of beach on which stood three Chukchi yarangs. A skin boat immediately stood off from the shore, with all the population of the encampment in it, including old men and little babies. Who would stay ashore when he could watch trading being done on the deck of the American schooner?

The whole boatload quickly clambered on board and stood regarding the Americans and the deck cargo with great curiosity.

Captain Brown's floating store held a great attraction for the hunters. Here a man knew he would always be treated to food and a drink. And after a drink a man's heart grows gay and kind and trading becomes a cheerful business.

Mr. Brown could not be called stingy. He immediately gave orders for tea to be served the guests with the generous addition of two soda crackers for each person. The hunters drank their tea with gusto right there on deck.

Mr. Brown, with the smile of a benefactor, asked:

"Are there many white fox pelts ashore?"

"Very many! And many white bears, too! And red foxes, ermines, squirrels and wolf pelts," answered an old hunter.

"No schooner has come this way yet. Yours is the first this summer," said another.

"Has Charlie Red Nose bought many fox pelts this winter?"

"Very many! Very many!" replied an elderly hunter artlessly as he sipped his tea. "I sold all my white foxes to him. There are only three pelts left for you. Here they are, in this bag."

"There is not much sense in that noddle of yours. Don't you know that Charlie Red Nose is a swindler? Yet you have taken all your pelts to him! Why didn't you leave them for me? Did you do such a bad trade with me last summer? Didn't you get a lot of goods from me. Does Charlie Red Nose trade better than I do? Ugh! Your head does not work at all—it has bird's brains in it," said Captain Brown reproachfully, tapping the man's bared head with a gnarled stubby finger.

The hunter got up grinning shamefacedly and shuffling his feet. He said:

"I had to buy a rifle last winter, and I was short of cartridges. The tobacco was all gone, too, and I had no tea..."

"Are those white foxes in your bag good ones?" broke in Captain Brown. "Maybe they are off-colour—those Charlie Red Nose wouldn't have?"

"No, no, they are good white pelts."

"All right. Come down with me."

Captain Brown descended the little hold in the stern of the ship which had already been opened up. Seating himself on one of the many packing cases lying there he pulled two neatly wrapped tablets of chewing gum out of his breast pocket with a deft movement. He tossed one of them to the hunter, who all but caught it in his mouth, and unwrapped the other one which he promptly popped into his own mouth filled with shining gold teeth. He then casually pulled a flask of whisky from his hip pocket and threw the hunter a shrewd look.

A flush mounted to the hunter's face.

"I thought you were my friend," said the skipper, tossing the flask up into the air and catching it as it came down. "But it seems that Charlie Red Nose is your friend," he wound up, deliberately pocketing it again.

"I have a bearskin in my yarangi!" cried the hunter.

"A bearskin? Okay! Now you're talking sense. In that case I'll still consider you my friend."

The captain pulled a collapsible cup out of his knee pocket and poured some whisky into it.

"Here you are!"

He spat the wad of gum over the side with amazing dexterity of aim and took several pulls from the flask.

The hunter, with a thrill of pleasurable anticipation, held the cup in his trembling hands and a slow smile spread over his face. Then he drew the chewing gum out of his mouth with the aid of two fingers and tossed off the whisky in a single gulp.

"A-a-ah, good!" he said in a singsong voice.

Captain Brown refilled the cup without offering anything in the way of a snack. Indeed, the hunter himself

would have declined it, not wishing to spoil the taste of the firewater.

"Oh, you won't easily find another skipper like me," said Brown.

"Very good skipper, fine skipper," babbled the hunter groggily, then he shouted up from the hold:

"Chovka! Bring the bearskin from my yarang, quick!"

The trading was soon over. Captain Brown climbed up on deck and ordered the engine to be got under way.

"I guess we'll have to wait a little, Cap'n," said Harlow with a lewd grin. "Jim's busy in the engine room with a gal."

"Goddam!" growled the captain. "This is no time for love-making! We've got to get a move on!"

The *Polar Bear* laid its course due north. There was not a ripple on the sea as the schooner sped along, coasting the shore. A cloud of birds, startled by a random shot, rose screaming from the cliffs. They circled in the sky like snowflakes in a blizzard. The sea was free of ice. Everything augured a fair and prosperous voyage. Captain Brown stood by the wheel, scanning the sea.

"Well, how's it for a start, skipper?"

"Not bad, Harlow. Not at all bad. That guy's now got exactly eleven dollars fifty-two cents' worth of American goods. The fox pelts have worked out at two dollars fifty apiece. The bearskin's not much to speak of, but I guess it'll fetch a wee bit more'n we paid for it!"

And their hearty laughter awoke the startled echoes on the deserted shore.

Mr. Brown, Mr. Harlow and Jim the cook had emigrated to the States in their youth where they had followed a variety of occupations and travelled the length and breadth of the country. Mexico and California they knew as well as they knew Alaska and the Chukotsk coast.

Five years ago they had formed a small private company, purchased a schooner and said: "Well, old gal, take us to where the white bear lives!" They had sought the shores of Chukotsk to try their luck in this land of open chances and customs-free trading.

Every winter Captain Brown fitted out his annual expedition for which purpose he scoured the junkstores of Seattle and 'Frisco where he bought up a lot of cheap lumber and gewgaws for next to nothing. On the Chukotsk coast these wares would make the eyes of the native hunters gleam.

"What about putting in at Loren, Harlow? That old coot Thompson will go stark crazy when we tell him this year's news. He prefers to have his news a year old—but dammit if we don't ram it down his throat. Let him swallow the pill whether he likes it or not."

"I say, Skipper, when he hears that the North Co.'s huge steamer *Beachaimo* is coming out from Vancouver he'll sure have a fit."

"Shouldn't be surprised if he swallows his goggles when he hears it!"

The two Americans guffawed.

The galvanized iron roof of Thompson's store glistened dully in the distance.

No sooner did the *Polar Bear* drop anchor than a Chukchi boat shoved off from the beach and rowed swiftly towards the ship amid an excited clamour. Among the hunters in the boat sat Charles Thompson.

"Hello, Captain!" he cried as he clambered up the short ladder.

Mr. Harlow hastened to the side and reaching down a long arm deftly hoisted Mr. Thompson's bulk onto the deck. They went straight to the little cabin where the skipper was waiting to receive them.

Mr. Thompson sank into an easy chair. Captain Brown settled himself on his right, Harlow on the left.

Jim, with a great show of ceremony and scraping, placed cups of steaming coffee and a bowl of fruit on the table.

"Help yourself, Mr. Thompson! You don't have oranges growing in these parts. Imagine yourself for a moment back in civilization—try 'em," invited the captain.

"Thanks, I'd prefer a pipeful of Prince Albert's."

Mr. Harlow promptly proffered him a tin with that elegant gentleman's picture on the outside complete in swallow tails and immaculate little beard.

Mr. Thompson inhaled the fragrant smoke, then suddenly asked:

"What's the news in America, Captain?"

"Hello, since when have you been interested in the latest news?" said the captain with a laugh. "Don't you get it any more from the next year's papers?"

"I might die in the meantime, Captain, and not know what's going on in the world. These are strange times, you know. A man's got to have his news quick these days."

"You've said it, Mr. Thompson. There's plenty of news, let me tell you. A carload of news!"

"More'n a carload, Cap'n!" flung in Mr. Harlow. "A whole darned shipload—the *Beuchaimo*!"

"In short, Mr. Thompson, you and I have been caught up in the vortex of big international politics. Countries are making politics and our pockets have got to suffer for it. Yes, Mr. Thompson, suffer for it. I ask you—you're an experienced man of the world, Mr. Thompson,—what do you make of it?"

Captain Brown puffed at his pipe for a while in silence, then pursued:

"Take even this Godforsaken hole—you'd think, now who the devil wants it? Eh? What big man of business would want to mess about with blubber? But there are

such men, Mr. Thompson, and big men, too, who are keen to get their greedy paws on this here coast. As for us small fry these sharks'll swallow us whole without the least compunction." Here Captain Brown pulled a wry face fit to unnerve the steadiest heart. "And the worst of it is, Mr. Thompson, that we're tied hand and foot—they won't give us a dog's chance."

"Who won't?" asked Mr. Thompson quietly.

"The Bolsheviks, Mr. Thompson, the Bolsheviks! Revolutions you know. You and I are chatting in Bolshevik waters, if you please. How do you like it, Mr. Thompson? Those Bolsheviks are a pretty smart lot, let me tell you. But that's not where the trouble lies! The trouble is that they have given the North Company the sole rights of trading on Kamchatka and the Chukotsk coast. That's called a concession, my dear Mr. Thompson. And take my word for it, in no less than a month these dismal shores will hear the screech of Vancouver steamers. They'll screech here like jackals in the desert, blast 'em! Do you know, Mr. Thompson, that the North Company's *Beachaimo* is docked right now at 'Frisco taking on cargo?"

Captain Brown paused to let this sink in and stole a glance at Mr. Thompson's face.

"Ten thousand tons, Mr. Thompson! Not the hundred and twenty tons of my poor little *Polar Bear*!"

Mr. Thompson caught his breath. Who on earth would have thought that the North Company would be seriously interested in this territory! A company with a fleet of a hundred and forty ships! That Bolshevik Zhukov must have been telling the truth after all.

The Captain went on:

"You know, Mr. Thompson, the North Company is going to set up trading posts all over the place like those on the Hudson Bay, and stock 'em with genuine first-class goods. D'you know what that means, Mr. Thomp-

son? It means we'll have to quit. And there's no place to go to except Mars," the skipper added with a gesture of despair. "Judging by the American press this is going to be a trade monopoly with strictly controlled prices both on furs and goods. That was stipulated by the Russian government. I'd like to see those Bolshevik guys trying to control the North Company! There's going to be some fun here if they do, mark my words! D'you think that savage who's been buttering our bread for us till now will bring his trade to you or me unless we're prepared to barter at a loss? No fear! He's got sense or animal instinct enough to know which trail is best for him to follow—you may be sure of that, Mr. Thompson!"

Mr. Thompson removed his glasses and began wiping them without any apparent need. Perspiration had broken out in the lines of his face. Captain Brown at that moment was thinking how he could get his hands on the furs this old ape was sitting on.

"Another thing, Mr. Thompson. Your firm's agent probably won't be coming here any more. He won't risk sneaking past Kerry's customs line."

"Quite right," threw in Mr. Harlow, who had grasped what the skipper was driving at.

"Yes, Mr. Thompson," the skipper went on. "And you may find yourself sitting here with those furs rotting under you. With us it's different. We run a risk. If we slip through, all well and good. But your man Olaf represents a respectable house. Besides, his fifteen hundred ton schooner is too conspicuous to be wangled past the customs. So there you are, Mr. Thompson!"

The skipper got up, spat through the porthole and began pacing the little "saloon."

"What am I to do with my furs?" said Mr. Thompson in dismay.

"You know best. And now—you're an old-timer on this coast—where'd you advise me to anchor so's we can

get through our business as quick as possible? I shouldn't be surprised to see a Soviet gunboat start nosing around and haul me off to some port I wouldn't care to visit. I'm beginning to take those Soviet guys seriously!"

Mr. Thompson wiped his glasses again and said non-committally:

"Well, you might try Enmakai. They say Alitet's got some furs to trade this season."

Mr. Thompson got into his boat with a heavy heart.

"Good-bye, Captain! Hope you do a good trade with Alitet. I think you'll find it to our mutual interest."

"Okay, Mr. Thompson!"

The heart of the *Polar Bear* began to throb. With sails set and a favourable wind the schooner was propelled northward under screw and canvas.

"I wonder what Thompson's feeling like just now, Harlow?"

"I think he'll sure throw a fit one o' these nights, Cap'n."

The smugglers burst out laughing. Mr. Harlow drew a flask out of his hip pocket and took several pulls at it.

"If he does go off his rocker—and I think he will—it would be a good idea for you, Cap'n, to get hitched with Mary on our way back. You'll never buy so many pelts as that gent has bought in a single winter."

The skipper clicked his tongue and said half-seriously:

"Not a bad idea that, Harlow! With an heiress like that the banks wouldn't kick up much fuss about coughing up the dough. I daresay it's a better idea than the one I had in mind when I was talking to pop."

Mr. Harlow chuckled and said insinuatingly:

"They say he has a couple of hundred thousand on his account. With a tidy sum like that one could make a go of it in the States."

CHAPTER TWO

The Enmakai settlement presented a changed appearance that summer. Not far from Alitet's yarang stood a new building of the type only to be met with among the Tangs. That building belonged to Alitet and served as a store. Its walls, made of light American sailcloth stretched between posts driven into the ground, admitted sufficient light to dispense with windows. The roof, like that of Mr. Thompson's store, was made of corrugated galvanized sheeting. Even the feeble rays of the sun shining through the clouds were enough to warm it, and it was quite dry inside. From afar the store resembled a large rich dwelling.

But the riches were inside. From long walrus thongs strung up in five lines hung bunches of two and four pelts of white, red and silver foxes and polar wolves—in all about a thousand pelts. In one corner lay a neat pile of white bearskins, in another a huge heap of walrus ivory and whalebone.

Alitet carefully examined the pelts, shaking them out by the tails. Never before had Alitet possessed so many furs! Charlie had helped him to become a real trader. Alitet's eyes glistened when he thought of the big trade he was going to do.

Alitet's experienced eye was quick to notice any irregularities in the storage or defects in the treatment of the skins—either white foxes were not hanging in the right light, or red fox pelts had not been properly prepared, or the bearskins required looking over. His imperious voice rang out in the store and Tumatuge would come rushing in to do his bidding.

He quickly took down the pelts and cleaned off the superfluous fat and flesh with rye meal, never for a moment suspecting that bread could be made out of that flour.

His trading yarang had raised Alitet still higher in the estimation of all the hunters and trappers in the locality. Only Vaamcho and old Vaal regarded this new acquisition with eyes of hostility.

A young woman entered the store. This was Atteneut, Alitet's third wife, the sister of Narginaut his first wife. Alitet had brought her home quite recently, having taken her from Kaino without even the compensation of a bad dog.

"Tumatuge, show Atteneut how to cure the skins. She has never had a chance to learn it. Her husband Kaino is a trashy hunter and she rarely held a pelt in her hands."

After issuing sundry other orders Alitet stalked out of the store and betook himself to the lookout standing on a knoll. From this eminence Alitet usually watched passing herds of walruses and kept an observation on the sea. The post which served as the tower's support had been washed ashore and had evidently once been the mast of an old frigate. At its base was a cunningly wrought figure of a grandee of Catherine II's days in an elaborate and skilfully carved wig. Now the mast stood on the shore, planted in the ground, with the grandee's head peeping out from under the grass. Slats of wood nailed to the mast in the form of rungs led up to a small platform resembling the masthead of a ship.

Alitet climbed to the top, put his binoculars to his eyes and suddenly emitted a yell:

"A ship! A ship!"

People came running out of their yarangs. The dogs, infected by the general excitement, set up a loud barking. Men intently scanned the ice-free sea.

Alitet clambered down, thrust the binoculars into Tumatuge's hands and said:

"Go up and have a look what ship it is!"

Tumatuge swiftly climbed the pole, much to the envy of all the men. Alitet permitted no one except Tumatuge to use the lookout.

"It's a schooner! Brown's coming!" shrieked Tumatuge.

Alitet shouted up:

"A schooner or a steamer?"

"A schooner, Alitet—with sails!"

"Are you sure?"

"It's a schooner, Alitet. My eyes see well. I recognize Brown's ship. The schooner has two masts."

"Don't any of you dare to go out to the schooner when it stops here," Alitet warned the hunters. "Let the Mericans come ashore if they need us. They have a little boat."

Alitet went into his yarang, took off his fur shirt and put on an American checked shirt.

"Tygrena, change your fur clothes for cloth ones. The Mericans will soon be here. Make a reindeer soup, quickly. And don't forget to put salt in it, the way I taught you. The Tangs do not like their food without salt. Be sure to lay out the Tang bowls, the iron fingers and knives—everything the way Charlie does. And stew the meat without water, only with white Tang fat. When the Tangs start eating don't grab the meat with your hands—use the iron fingers."

Tygrena busied herself cooking an American meal. "I would rather prepare dirty meat for the dogs that waste my time on this food," thought Tygrena with a sigh.

Alitet's wives each had their respective duties allotted to them. One took care of the dogs, another looked after the household and the third performed special tasks. Lately Alitet had taught Tygrena to prepare food in the American way.

He had bought a supply of mustard, pepper, onions and other spices. Plates, forks, table knives and other

things which he had seen on Charlie's table made their appearance in Alitet's household.

Of course, no one in the family, still less Alitet himself, had the least desire to taste this Tang food. But since a Tang did happen to drop in sometimes Alitet had to show that he too was a real Merican. On these occasions Tygrene cast off her fur garments and donned a cloth dress. For Alitet willed it so. He insisted upon introducing these foreign ways though they were as alien to him as they were to the rest of his household.

Alitet came in with a box containing an amazing assortment of strange foods—salt, onions, mushrooms, tomato sauce, dried potatoes, pepper and what not.

"Fancy making a stew out of all that stuff," thought Tygrene moodily. "Even the dogs would not touch it. Why spoil good reindeer meat with all this rubbish in little packages?"

Tygrene gingerly picked up an onion and began cutting it on the bare floor. Suddenly a sharp pain stung her eyes and they filled with tears. She flung the onion from her in disgust and began rubbing her eyes furiously.

"What is the sense in spoiling reindeer meat by putting this evil-smelling onion in it? Or this salt, which burns your tongue and all your mouth and makes you sick?"

Tygrene opened a tin of pepper. She decided to taste this black powder and tipped some of it onto her tongue. The next instant she dashed out of the yarang shrieking, flung herself on the ground and began hurriedly licking the snow.

Alitet came up.

"Why do you howl like a she-wolf?" he asked indifferently.

"I tried some of the Tang food," wailed Tygrene. "I fear I shall burst soon."

"You fool-woman—that is because you are not used to it. The Tangs eat it and still live. You will get used to it too. The schooner will soon be here. Hurry up and prepare the Merican food."

Tygrena's face flamed and she had a feeling in her mouth as though someone had lit a fire in it. She got up and went back into the yarang.

Meat was stewing in a pot. How delicious it smelled! Now this was real food. But she had to make it Merican—spoil it.

Tygrena threw a handful of salt into the pot. On second thoughts she added another handful, followed by a third. She peered into the box with a thoughtful air. What other package should she use for the Tang food? After a moment's reflection she emptied the contents of the whole box into the pot. Then she tasted it, spat and said:

"And the Tangs like that horrible food!"

CHAPTER THREE

The *Polar Bear* bore down on the Enmakai settlement in full sail. She swung round jauntily and lay to.

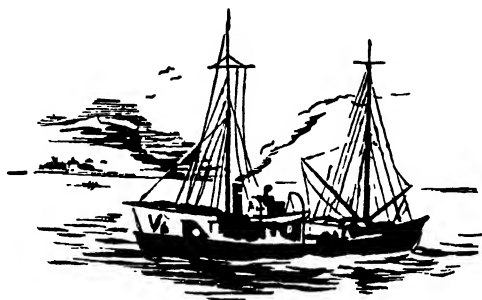
"Stand by to drop anchor!" commanded Captain Brown and forthwith executed the order himself. Steersman Harlow furled and lashed the sails. The schooner swung round on the tide.

The Americans lounged on deck while the people of the Enmakai settlement swarmed on the beach burning with curiosity. Alitet for some reason had forbidden them to go out to the schooner. Why he had done so no one could understand. It looked as though Alitet was turning Tang. His actions were becoming more and more puzzling and incomprehensible.

"What the hell are they dawdling about on the beach for? They don't seem to be in a hurry to come out. Jim,

give 'em a turn on the foghorn!" growled Captain Brown, feeling rather nettled.

Jim seized the handle with alacrity and began turning it with might and main. The ship's siren emitted a series of earsplitting blasts. The diversion seemed to please the spectators on shore. They even stopped throwing pebbles into the water. But that was the only effect it had.



Captain Brown scanned the beach through his binoculars with a puzzled air.

"Have they anything to come out in, Skipper?"

"Don't be silly, Harlow! Can't you see their boats and even a whaleboat on the beach?" snapped the skipper, who was beginning to lose his temper.

"Probably those savages have gorged themselves with walrus meat and are too darned lazy to shove the boat off," said Harlow falling in with the captain's mood.

"Jim, stand by to lower the boat!"

"Aye, aye, Sir!"

Leaving the schooner riding at anchor the entire crew got into the boat and made for the shore.

Alitet, who was watching the Americans through a slit in the wall of his store, came out at this juncture and sauntered down to meet them. He stood out sharply

among the rest of the crowd in his American shirt and eyeshade.

"Hello, Alitet!" cried Captain Brown from the boat.

The men standing on the beach caught the boat as its bows grounded on the pebbles and hauled it ashore with its occupants sitting in it.

"Why didn't you come out to the schooner? Have you become a poor man—nothing to barter for my goods? Or maybe you don't need them?" said the captain as he exchanged greetings with Alitet.

"Even a foolish hunter needs goods. I need them as well. And I have fox pelts. Do you see my store?"

"Oh, that's a fine store! But why didn't you come aboard the schooner?"

"The boats are strung up and it's a pity to run the whaleboat down over trifles. Besides, your boat is always handy—I knew that you had a little boat on the ship."

The Americans turned towards the settlement. The throng on the beach surged after them, but Alitet waved them back with an imperious gesture.

"What a big store!" observed the captain. "Now I can see that you are getting to be a real trader all right!"

Alitet grinned, and with a gesture towards the store, said proudly:

"In here are many white fox skins. All as white as snow. And all properly cleaned and treated. If you have brought plenty of goods we shall do a big trade. If you have little goods we shall wait for the next schooner."

Captain Brown, pretending not to have heard, hurried into the store. The sight that met his eyes took his breath away. The smuggler's eyes gleamed.

"This looks like business, boys!" he said, addressing his partners in English.

Hiding the admiration that shone in his eyes, the skipper walked slowly down the rows of hanging skins,

shaking a pelt out here and there by the tail with a businesslike air, then turned to Alitet and let fall casually:

"No off-grade pelts?"

"Oh no!" answered Alitet shaking his head with a crafty smile. Then turning to Tumatuge he commanded sharply: "Bring me an off-grade fox from the yarang, quick!"

Tumatuge was gone in a flash and quickly reappeared with a darkish pelt having very short overhair and discoloured sides and handed it to Alitet.

"Here's an off-grade pelt: Look, Brown! You are a trader—you should know what an off-grade pelt is. I don't keep skins like this in my store. They are dumped in my yarang where my women make mittens out of them. These white foxes you see here are the very finest. They are very good pelts!" Alitet volubly assured him.

"Okay, Alitet! You'll get a lot of fine goods from me. Ever such a lot!" said Captain Brown as he left the store, which he did with an air of utter unconcern, as though he were not in the least interested in white foxes.

"Well, Alitet, and now come aboard the schooner and be my guest. You can have a look at my cargo while you're at it."

"I want to look at it here on the shore. I don't like the sea any more. I have even stopped hunting the walrus in my whaleboat. But first let us go to my yarang to eat. I want very much to treat Merican man. I told my woman to prepare a good reindeer, to cook the meat in the Merican way. I very much want to treat Merican man. I won't go to the schooner," Alitet said in a tone of finality.

"Jim, cut off back to the schooner and fetch some liquor, plenty of it. Step on it!" the skipper commanded.

"Only I want to do all the trading by myself, Captain. I don't want your goods to get into other hunters' hands. There is a hunter here named Vaamcho. He has

three white foxes. He'll want to barter them. If you trade with him I'll shut my store."

"Oh, I understand! What do I want with his three pelts? Let some other schooner go about picking up three pelts at a time. I want to trade wholesale."

Jim did not keep them waiting long. The Americans burst noisily into Alitet's yarang and settled themselves on downy new reindeer skins.

Tygreña, who was acting as hostess, was thrown into confusion when the Americans shook her hand and said something in a strange tongue. She had never shaken hands with anyone in her life. On top of this Jim had given her a pinch when no one was looking.

Soon plates, forks and spoons and a saucepan filled with a rich soup were placed on a low table.

"Here we are—quite like an American restaurant!" cried the skipper, winking at his companions and moving up to the table.

The Americans sat around the table in half-reclining attitudes. Alitet, too, squatted with his feet tucked under him, looking like a Buddha.

"Jim, strikes me you have a crush on that gal, getting a proper eyeful you are," said the skipper.

"I notice you're taking in the sights, too, Cap'n," retorted Jim deferentially.

The three men burst into a laugh.

"I seem to be the only guy here who's keeping my weather eye open on business," put in Mr. Harlow as he fished out a bottle of whisky from a small grip.

"Cups!" commanded Alitet.

Tygreña bent over the table, placing out big enamelled mugs. Jim laid his hand on her back.

"Jim, you devill!" cried the skipper. "If only you'd tack on to the canvas in a gale as tight as you're sticking to this gal!"

"You're a happy-go-lucky beggar, Jim," added Mr.

Harlow soberly. "You're forgetting business. Remember twelve of this firm's shares belong to you."

Captain Brown filled a mug to the brim and set it before Alitet.

"I don't want any whisky," said Alitet with a shrug. "Charlie said that a real trader drinks whisky after the deal. It is only hunters with two or three pelts who drink before striking a bargain! They need it to cheer them up. I'm cheerful enough as it is."

"Charlie's been telling you a pack of lies. I am a real trading man, aren't I? And yet I'm going to drink—you just watch. On the contrary, a real trading man drinks before he starts business. I know better than Charlie." Saying which the captain drained his mug.

Mr. Harlow pushed the whisky over to Alitet and clinked mugs, saying coaxingly:

"Alitet wants to drink with me!"

But Alitet narrowed his oblique eyes, shrunk back and said with a protesting gesture:

"No, no, no!"

The Americans exchanged surprised glances.

"Looks like that ginger rat Thompson's been up to monkey tricks. He's put this guy up to this," growled the skipper.

"Yes, Sir—I think so too," said Harlow. "But never mind, Cap'n. He won't hold out long. I can see his mouth watering already."

Jim tasted a spoonful of soup and flung the spoon down with a gasp.

"Holy smokes, Cap'n, this stuff's murder! Tastes like fire!"

"Look here, Jim, we mustn't offend the host. You saw the pelts hanging in his store, didn't you? I'd eat live mice for them," said Harlow.

"I'll put you under hatches for a week unless you lick that plate up dry," said the captain grimly.

"Okay, Skipper! Let's hope you survive this bean-feast. If anything happens to me please send poor Jim's body to his mammy in Portland," said the cook and attacked the soup with the recklessness of despair.

Tygreña sat in a corner of the polog sewing. She was as curious as a seal and furtively watched the Americans.

They seemed to be eating that horrible food with gusto. She was greatly tempted to laugh, but there was no excuse for it—food is no laughing matter.

The Americans ate all the soup. Tygreña next served them dry-stewed meat likewise generously flavoured and salted.

"Now, that's what I call real food! Cooked the American way!" said the captain encouragingly.

Jim spluttered and nearly choked.

"Well, Alitet, this fine food needs washing down with whisky—what do you say?"

But the guests drank once more by themselves.

Tygreña stared at the Americans as though fascinated. But who amazed her most was Alitet. Was he a Tang that he so greedily devoured this loathsome American food?

When they had at last waded through the dreary meal, which was no less an ordeal to Alitet than it was to his guests, the men went outside and gulped the fresh air into their lungs.

Vast flocks of wild ducks flew past with a loud squawking and whir of wings. They flew along the shore in an endless stream and it seemed as though this great migration to the north would never cease.

Nearby the settlement, where a little promontory jutted out into the sea across the path of the flying ducks, Alitet had rigged up a long net stretched between tall poles. The birds struck the net in full flight and were left fluttering and struggling with their heads caught in the meshes, while the flocks coming up behind,

seeing the danger, soared upwards and continued their flight unmolested.

The *Polar Bear* lay riding at anchor in the offing. The Americans again invited Alitet to inspect the goods on board the schooner, but he flatly refused, saying:

"No, all trade goods are the same. They are not fox pelts—some good, some bad. There is no need to look at your cargo. We will trade here on shore."

The Americans, annoyed at his obstinacy, went into the store. Captain Brown, repressing his excitement, walked round the rows of hanging pelts in silence. Suffering from the aftereffects of the execrable dinner he glared at the skins and resembled a beast of prey snapping its jaws at the baited hook. They were as good as his, but there was that sly-eyed devil to be taken into account—one never knew what he would be up to next, damn him! Whoever heard of a savage refusing whisky? But a fellow would be a crass idiot to let such a chance slip through his fingers. He wouldn't be Captain Brown if he didn't get those pelts at any price. Nothing short of murder would stop him from getting them, not if he had to resort to all the tricks of the pirate's game.

"Okay! Let's trade here then, on shore, in this fine store of yours," he cried with feigned cheerfulness, and sat down on the pile of bearskins with his feet planted wide apart and his hands clasping his knees.

"What goods do you want, Alitet?"

Alitet's brown face beamed. He swiftly pulled down two pelts, shook them before the captain's nose and said blandly:

"For these I want tobacco. Only tobacco!"

"Who does trade that way? We must figure out the value of all your furs and you'll get all the goods in a lump. You are not a foolish hunter, you are a real trading man."

"But I am foolish. We are all foolish. I don't know how to do trade in a lump. I did not buy the skins in a lump either, but one at a time. Let us trade little by little."

"Have you gone crazy, Alitet? If we trade pelt by pelt I shall be stuck here for a week. The ice will come up and throw my schooner ashore."

"No, it won't. I know there will be no ice yet. You ask me about the ice. I know all about it. Wait, I will go out and look at the sky and then I'll tell you for sure."

"There's no need to," said the captain in a tone of exasperation.

"Very good—no need to! Well, give me tobacco for these two pelts. Nothing but tobacco."

"Why, have you forgotten how to do trade—you demand one article in exchange for two pelts? That's not the way trade is done in America."

"I need a lot of tobacco. Oh, a lot! All the tundra dwellers are without tobacco. Everybody wants to smoke, but there is nothing to smoke. So what do you say?" persisted Alitet. "Afterwards I'll see—maybe I'll take some more tobacco for two more skins. I have to think! It's easy for them tundra people—all they know is, 'Give us tobacco.' But who must do all the thinking? Alitet must."

"Harlow, go out to the schooner with Jim and fetch over some Kentucky leaf. Bring a few cases of Black Navy plug tobacco, too, and a case of chewing tobacco," ordered the captain.

"Tumatuge, you go with them—you will help them. You can take my whaleboat now, their boat is too small," said Alitet.

The captain paced the store in silence. Alitet trotted beside him.

"We shall do a good trade, a long trade," he babbled. "Trading is a jolly business, like a big holiday. I shall

tell Tygrena to make an American dinner for tonight and tomorrow. I do not grudge food for a good man."

The memory of his recent dinner brought a hiccough from the captain. His feelings choked utterance. It was all he could do to control his wrath and bring himself round to that cheerful frame of mind which was so essential for the serious business he had on hand.

A bale of Kentucky leaf tobacco was dragged into the store.

"Here, take one bale," said the captain, reaching out for the fox pelts which were slung over Alitet's shoulder.

Alitet handed over the skins and pulled down another pair, shook them out and said:

"Some more tobacco for these."

The captain's brows came down in a heavy scowl and he growled:

"Why, you have clean forgotten how to trade! I paid you a whole bale of tobacco for two pelts as a start, and you want more! Do you know that this bale holds a hundred and twelve English pounds? Do you think that Kentucky leaf tobacco can be picked up for the asking on the American coast? It's got to be paid for in dollars! It's not like catching a pair of white foxes which run around near your yarangs."

Alitet listened with half an ear, for he was busy with his own thoughts and calculations—"How much more tobacco do I need?"

After a pause he said:

"Alitet knows that tobacco grows on your coast like the grass in our river valleys. Very, very much grows there! I know. Charlie told me. . . . Here, take two more fox pelts for another bale."

The second bale was dragged in. In all four skins had been bartered. The captain surveyed the strung up pelts in dismay. There were about a thousand of them

there, perhaps more. How long would he have to stay here before he finished trading with this savage? In any case it was plain that the ship's cargo would not suffice for this kind of barter.

Alitet placed one bale on top of the other and sat down on them. Tobacco! Here it was, tobacco! The pungent smell tickled his nostrils. He prized open a corner of the bale and pulled out a leaf. Filling his pipe with fresh tobacco he drew a sigh of contentment, grinned and lit up. After a while he pulled down another couple of pelts and said:

"For these I want plug tobacco! And then I'll see, perhaps I'll take some more leaf."

The infuriated skipper flung the pelts he had bartered at Alitet's feet and ordered his men to take the goods back to the ship.

Jim none too politely pushed Alitet off the bales and with the help of Mr. Harlow began dragging them out. The smile on Alitet's face faded and was replaced by a frown. He shouted angrily at Tumatuge:

"Fool man! Why do you stand there with your hands down as if they had no bones? Help the white men carry the goods to the beach! Even I will help the Merican men!" and he took hold of a case.

This piece of savage cunning filled the cup of the captain's wrath.

"We'll do without your help! Let those things alone!" he raved, and seized two cases at once.

"Ai, ai, ai! The captain himself is working! What a shame! But another schooner will call on me for sure. You will find trade bad up north and will have to take your goods back to Merica."

Alitet skipped around the captain, pouring sympathy into his ears.

"The hunters up north have no pelts. What they had are now hanging in my store. But never mind. You

go to them and see for yourself. Maybe they managed to trap some inferior summer foxes for you."

This derision threw the skipper into a towering rage and he turned on Alitet fiercely and told him to shut his mouth. Alitet went back to his store.

On the beach stood Vaamcho and old Vaal. To spite Alitet the captain said:

"Vaamcho, I hear you have three white foxes? Do you want these two bales of tobacco for them?"

Vaamcho stared at the captain in astonishment. Old Vaal said with a smile:

"Why so much? Vaamcho is not a trading man. We shall not smoke out two bales in all our lives."

Jim having loaded the boat the Americans pushed off, when suddenly Alitet appeared running towards them shouting: "Wait, wait!"

The Americans rowed hastily back to the shore, anticipating victory. Alitet ran up panting, and bringing out from under his shirt an ermine pelt, said to the captain:

"Here take this pelt. I have smoked a leaf out of your tobacco bale."

Captain Brown pushed off again without saying a word.

The *Polar Bear* swung round sharply and headed for North Cape.

Alitet climbed the lookout and gazed long at the schooner until it was lost to view.

CHAPTER FOUR

The midnight sun dipped its rim into the cold sea. The whole horizon was aglow with the crimson sunset. The people of the Enmakai settlement were deep in slumber, and only the children romped about on the beach

throwing pebbles into the sea and the old men potted around outside the yarangs. Their day began when for all real hunters it was ending. The nocturnal Arctic sun exercised an exciting effect on the children who raced up and down the beach chewing sea cabbage and ran off to the lakes in the tundra to gather ducks' eggs. Of the adult hunters Tumatuge alone did not sleep. Alitet had ordered him to sit on the watch tower with a pair of binoculars and keep a lookout for any other ship that might appear.

Alitet tossed about on his bed of skins, unable to fall asleep. "It is no good that Brown got so angry. Maybe he will tell men that Alitet is no good and none of the captains will want to come near Enmakai?"

The crew of the *Polar Bear* as it came down the coast were in an equally bad humour.

"What d'you think, Cap'n—are we doing right to go back to Alitet?"

"Right or wrong, Harlow, we've got no choice. What else can you suggest? Wait for old Stefanson on his *Yukon* to sneak through under our noses? He's got the scent of a retriever, he has. He's a descendant of the ancient pirates, you know—got real Anglo-Saxon blood flowing in his veins. They've sailed all the seas and oceans and there isn't a nook or cranny in any part of the world they didn't get their hands into, except these Godforsaken shores, and he's taking care of them now. He's been nosing around here for the last few years. Not likely that he'll miss that store of Alitet's, damn him! Then don't forget that squint-eyed devil was telling the truth after all. I guess he really did mop up all the pelts along the coast, the goddam son of a bitch! He's hotter'n ginger Charlie to deal with. Thank goodness this looks like being our last trip out. So there you have the situation, Harlow!"

"That's all right, Cap'n. We shan't do so bad, even under those crazy conditions of his," said Harlow.

"Sure. Still, less than I figured on. Anyway, we can't go picking up odd pelts all along the damn coast—we haven't the time for it. The delay's too risky."

Captain Brown bent over the speaking tube and shouted down:

"Full speed ahead, Jim!"

At midnight Alitet was awakened by Tumatuge's voice:

"Alitet, a schooner's coming!"

Alitet scrambled to his feet with youthful agility. Dressing hastily he rushed to the lookout.

"Brown's coming back!" shouted Tumatuge pointing seawards.

Alitet, with an imperious wave of the hand commanded Tumatuge to climb down and went up in his place. What he saw threw him into such a frenzy of delight that he nearly toppled off the platform. A broad grin spread over his face as he clambered down.

"I have gone to sleep," he said. "Let nobody disturb me! Unless the Merican himself comes ashore and goes into my yarang—then let him wake me."

Alitet divested himself of all his clothes and soon the yarang resounded to his loud and peaceful snores.

The *Polar Bear* dropped anchor in the old spot and the Americans, no longer acting the haughty traders, promptly lowered their boat and came ashore.

"Where is Alitet?" asked Captain Brown.

"Alitet sleeps. He said he was not to be disturbed. . . . But you may waken him if you wish," replied Tumatuge.

"Okay," said the captain gruffly, and the Americans went into Alitet's yarang.

"A-ah! Brown!" said Alitet, rubbing his eyes. "Brown has come again? I like Merican man very much."

"You were right, Alitet. I went to Yakan Cape, but the trappers there didn't have any pelts. They had nothing to barter."

"I knew, I told you so. I like meeting Merican man very much," said Alitet, and turning to Tygrena commanded: "Quick, quick, make Merican soup! The same as yesterday, and we'll go in the meantime to the store."

"For Christ's sake, Cap'n, let me stay here and help the lady with the cooking. Otherwise he'll make us eat that devil's mess again!" implored Jim.

"Okay. Alitet, my Jim will help your wife with the cooking. He cooks for us too."

"Ai, ai, ai, that is good! Let Jim teach Tygrena how to cook. I am tired of explaining this woman's work."

So Jim and Tygrena were left alone in the yarang. Jim pulled a chef's cap out of his pocket, clapped it on his head and struck such a comical pose that Tygrena burst out laughing. Then he took the cap off and put it on Tygrena's head. Suddenly he threw his arm around her and crushed her to him.

Tygrena quivered with rage. Her eyes blazing she wrenched herself free, seized a chunk of reindeer meat that was lying on the floor and struck Jim across the face with it with all her might.

"Oho-o!" said an amazed Jim, wiping the reindeer blood from his face. "Not a bad poultice, that! Well, Cap'n, you and I ain't got much luck this trip!"

"All you Tangs are like mad dogs!" said Tygrena angrily. "That red-nosed Charlie, too—he made me lose my wits that time. . . . Aye fought him, and I too have learned to fight."

Tygrena picked up a sharp knife.

Not understanding what Tygrena was saying, but seeing that she was thoroughly roused, Jim sat down on the skins smiling nervously. Tygrena silently pushed the reindeer meat over to him and tossed him the knife. Jim took it and explained by signs that it was not big enough. He pulled out his jackknife, cut off a slice of meat and began beating such a vigorous tattoo on it that Tygrena

burst out laughing again. It seemed to her that the young American was making magic. That was how Korauge the shaman beat his drum.

"Come here, I'll show you how to make a steak. Look, this is the way you have to beat it," explained Jim by the aid of signs.

Tygreña did as he told her, laughing all the while. She could not understand why she had to beat the reindeer meat so hard.

Jim looked at Tygreña and for the first time the thought struck him: "What rotters we are! After all they're human beings with human feelings and desires."

And strange to say, Jim felt ashamed of himself.

CHAPTER FIVE

The trading with Alitet had been going on for a long time. At the end of the third day the store was stacked high with goods. The hunters and even the women lent an eager hand in dragging in the cargo and everybody smoked himself dizzy with fresh tobacco.

Alitet crawled about over the merchandise, carefully examining each case and bale and going over in his mind: "Now, what else do I need. I must not miss anything before Brown goes away. Oi, my head will burst with all this thinking."

He would pull down a pair of white or red foxes and demand more tobacco, cartridges, whisky, bunting, beads, knives, needles, traps, Winchesters and numerous other things that hunters needed.

"Lumme, Cap'n, I believe that squint-eyed heathen intends to skin us alive! I swear he will!" cursed Jim, bent beneath the weight of packages he was hauling into the store.

"Don't worry Jim. Things are not going so bad. He's

not driving such a hard bargain. He's infested by the general mood, drunk with joy, and getting more tractable," the skipper reassured him.

White, red and silver foxes flowed in a continuous stream into the captain's canvas bags. But the schooner's holds were emptying too. Alitet, his face beaming with satisfaction, fondled the packages, slapped the Winchesters affectionately and kept stacking away pile after pile of merchandise. Never before had Enmakai known such a holiday!

At the end of the fifth day Jim reported:

"Cap'n, there's nothing left aboard except the rest of the crew—two rats. They've got plenty of room now to promenade in!"

Captain Brown cast a longing look at the remaining furs, the pile of bearskins, the walrus tusks and the whalebone, and said:

"There are no more goods left on the schooner, Alitet. All sold out." And slapping Alitet on the back, added: "Well, are you pleased, Alitet?"

"Very, very good! Very pleased!"

"Do you want to trade with me the same way next year?"

"Ai, very much! I want to trade only with you!"

"Cap'n, it breaks my heart to see all the stuff that's left here—honest it does!"

"You just keep your mouth shut, Jim. I've got a little plan of me own."

"And now I very much want to treat you. The meal is ready. Tygreña has quickly learned to work with Jim. Come to my yarang!"

"Okay! Come on!" the captain readily agreed. "You are right, Alitet. It is good to drink whisky when the trading is finished."

"Yes, yes. Now we can drink. Now it is very good! My heart has been asking for firewater."

Alitet and the Americans squatted round the little table. Mugs of whisky were passed round and tossed off. Harlow refilled the mugs. A loose was given to mirth.

"Well, Jim, seems to me you're getting on with the missus like a house on fire?" said the skipper.

"That'll be written off against his account when we share the proceeds of the furs," said Harlow.

"Ah, gentlemen!" said Jim sadly. "How mistaken people are sometimes!"

Meanwhile the whisky had gone to Alitet's head and he mumbled thickly:

"Alitet is right. . . . Alitet knows everything. Didn't Alitet say there would not be any ice and the schooner would not be stranded. . . . We could do plenty more trade and still no ice would come:"

"That's true, Alitet, very true. You know all about it," intoned the captain. "We could trade for a long time yet! Do you know what I want to tell you, Alitet? Those furs that you've still got left in your store with the bearskins, tusks and whalebone ought to be loaded on the ship. If a storm comes up it will be bad sailing in an empty ship. It may capsize and we'll all be drowned—and I shan't be here to bring you more goods next year."

Alitet grew alert.

"If you want I can give you a paper for them and we can trade that paper separately next year. That's always done by traders," the captain said gravely.

Alitet pondered this. Then he recalled that Charlie traded papers, too, and believed in them as though they were real goods. He jumped to his feet and said quickly:

"Wait, I'll first go and count how many pelts are left."

"Skipper, you're a genius!" exclaimed Harlow.

"Hold on a bit, keep quiet or you'll scare the bird."

The Americans sat on in silence until Alitet returned.

"Two hundred and thirty pelts, Captain! Write a paper!" cried Alitet, running in.

Captain Brown pulled a notebook out of his breast pocket and began unscrewing the cap of his fountain pen with great deliberation and solemnity.

Alitet closely watched the captain "working" on paper. His scrutiny, however, in no way disconcerted the captain, who wrote the following:

"Good-bye, you squint-eyed devil! You've been a pain in the neck for me these five days, blast you and whoever it was put you up to this kind of trading. Don't worry—the rest of the furs will just put me right. So will the bearskins, damn you! They'll find a buyer in America. Good-bye again, this time for good. Yours truly

Taki Black Beetle."

"There you are, Alitet—here's the paper!" said Captain Brown gravely.

Alitet carefully folded the paper and put it in the pocket of his American shirt.

Soon the *Polar Bear* was speeding merrily on its way towards the coast of Alaska. Captain Brown came out of the cabin and went over to the wheel where Harlow was standing on the watch. The captain was holding a leaf from his notebook covered with figures and laughing heartily.

"Hell, he's fleeced us properly! That's never happened to me in all my born days. Those white fox pelts have worked out at over six dollars apiece."

Jim's head emerged through the engine-room hatch.

"All the same it's a pity we're not coming back next year, Cap'n. I'd be real glad to have another look at this coast."

"To look up Alitet's missus, you mean?"

"Maybel But you're on the wrong tack, Harlow, if you think bad of her. It's queer, but the way she acted she sort o' made me feel that we're pretty darned rotters."

"What?!" roared the captain.

CHAPTER SIX

Korauge the shaman beat his drum for two nights in succession on the occasion of his son's good trade with the Americans. Alitet let himself go with a vengeance and drank hard and deep for two days and two nights. The long and difficult trade with the crafty American had taxed his powers to breaking point and left him spent and exhausted. Yet there was a keen satisfaction in the knowledge that Enmakai now possessed a real big trading yarang, like that of Charlie Red Nose. And the boss of that yarang was Alitet himself.

Two days previously five young men had run off to the hills with glad tidings for the reindeer nomads—Alitet was inviting them down to do big trading. The heralds ran without stopping, eager to bring the good news. Its bearers would be greeted as old friends and feasted with choice morsels of reindeer meat, and who knows but the reindeer men might be generous enough in their delight to give them a present of reindeer skins for winter clothes.

At the close of the fourth day men began to arrive from the hills. They came with staffs in their hands and waterproof sealskin haversacks on their backs. But they had no furs in these sacks, for Alitet had collected all their fox pelts in the spring.

To Enmakai, too, came hunters and trappers who had not yet given Alitet any skins at all. But their need for goods was great and they hoped that Alitet would not refuse them.



Never before had the Enmakai settlement seen such bustle and such crowds. Tea stood boiling in a huge cauldron in the open air and men could drink it as much as they wanted—and with sugar too! Men discussed the recent calving season and related the news from their settlements. There was talk

without end.

At midday trade began. Alitet opened his store and the crowd surged in through the narrow door. Alitet allowed everyone to take whatever he wanted. Each man was to figure out for himself how much he could carry away and what he needed. Nothing was weighed, nothing was checked—and every one took only what he actually needed and not a thing more. Every article taken would be carefully remembered and if Alitet asked two years hence what a man had taken everything would be enumerated down to the last needle and box of matches!

There was only one restriction in their freedom of choice. Each man had to take no less than five traps from Alitet's store.

On one side stood a box of plug tobacco. Anyone who wished could go up and fill his pipe for nothing.

The whole crowd in the store was smoking. The doorway belched clouds of smoke, like the funnel of a steamer. Those who preferred quid tobacco helped themselves from another box. You could not smoke or chew so freely in the hills—there one had to use tobacco sparingly. Who said this was not a real holiday!

Men were setting aside goods for themselves who had not yet trapped any foxes. But they would trap them some day, wouldn't they? And Alitet said to them:

"Take whatever you need, come on! Help yourselves! Don't forget the traps. If you won't have any foxes next year you will give them to me later, when you catch them."

Alitet's heart rejoiced as he looked upon this big trading. But it would be still better in the winter when he would sit down in his sledge and ride the round of all the settlements collecting all the available fox pelts, white, red and silver. He would not even look at them, but simply say: "Throw them into my sledge!" And there were going to be many pelts! There would now be double the number of traps in the tundra.

Alitet said to Tumatuge:

"There are many guests in our settlement. Let them be feasted with meat in every yarang. Let them go in groups of five and ten to each yarang. Let the meat be given out from my pits."

"Eheil!" cried Tumatuge and dashed off as fast as his legs could carry him to spread the joyful news.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Arctic summer of the year 1923 was a particularly favourable one for navigation. The entire coast line was free of ice, the large masses of which had been driven far north by the south winds that prevailed here at this time of the year.

The steamship *Soviet* was entering the Bering Strait bound for the Kolyma coast which had not been receiving supplies from the mainland for many years and where Whiteguard bands had long been disturbing the peace of the northern inhabitants.

The *Soviet* had on board the chief of the Special Service Detachment, Tolstukhin, and the representative of the Kamchatka Revcom assigned to the Chukotsk Region, Los.



"Well, Los, here's your district—take a look at it," said Tolstukhin. "You go ashore today. You'll get a view of your residence as soon as we enter the strait."

"Then I'll soon be seeing my Martians?"

"What Martians?"

"Well, don't they live here as on another planet?"

"Yes, you're right. Here's a country spreading before you for over two thousand kilometres. Go ahead, take over control! But you'll have to forget about your armoured train, my dear fellow. They've got nothing but dog-teams here."

"Well, I don't mind the dog-teams for a change," replied Los gravely.

Commissioner Los was a man of huge stature, slow in movement and speech, but swift in decision and action. Ex-commander of an armoured train in the civil war, he had, on arriving at Kamchatka, received an assignment to the Chukotsk Region. His idea of the territory was vague, and now, standing on the deck of the *Soviet*, he intently scanned the lifeless rock-bound wastes that stretched before him.

The Bering Strait resembled a huge placid lake with native hunters' boats scudding over its smooth surface. Their dwellings stood huddled amid a chaos of rock, clinging to the sheer cliffs overlooking the sea like so many birds' nests.

It seemed an odd and inconvenient spot to choose for a home. But the sea hunters and trappers who inhabited it were used to it and loved the place. Every rock and ledge and notch in the hillside was dear to them

with memories of childhood. They clambered up and down the sheer slopes in their soft skin boots with the agility of mountain goats. They would have found it dull walking on flat stretches without these rocks.

There was always good walrus hunting in the strait, where large herds passed on their way to the Arctic Ocean as through the gateway of a spacious yard. And where there is walrus there is a life of plenty. This was the edge of the world. From here, looking across the strait, one could glimpse the mountains of Alaska looming dimly in the northeast.

The mist lifted and the sun shone out. It did not set at all at this time of the year. The silent Chukchi yarangs stood out in grey patches on the coast like clinging lichen on stones.

"It's a pity I didn't learn anything about the country before coming out," said Los. "All I know about it is its approximate area, which I measured by the captain's chart. And this was called a county—some county, eh! Over four hundred thousand square kilometres!"

"My dear man! Who d'you think was going to give you information about this region? We haven't yet got the Soviet men who have studied it," remarked Tolstukhin.

"I sent a young fellow out here from Petropavlovsk last winter by dog sledge," said Los. "A clever fellow. A student. Studied at the geographical faculty. Speaks several languages. He learned Chukchi, too, from an old professor. I felt pretty rotten when I saw him off on that long journey. Who knows whether he made it or not?"

"Yes, Los, there's not a square mile anywhere on this vast territory from which one could send a radio message. A man who steps on these shores can truly be said to disappear into thin air."

Two islands appeared in the distance—great rocky piles.

"The captain says one of them's ours, the smaller one American," said Los, his keen eye searching the distance.

"Let me have your binoculars a minute, Tolstukhin!" he asked, and when he had gazed his fill, said: "Take a look, there's a two-masted ship over there. That's the first one we've met."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, Los! Why, it must be the American steamer *Beachaimo* carrying cargo for the new trading posts on the Chukotsk coast. D'you remember them talking about it at the Revcom? Here, let's have a look."

After a while Tolstukhin said:

"Some little schooner."

"They stood watching the schooner which at first bore down on them, then suddenly altered its course and closed in with the islands.

Tolstukhin and Los joined the captain on the bridge.

"What's that boat over there, Captain," asked Los, holding his binoculars out to the captain.

"I've seen it. My binoculars are a little stronger than yours. A smuggler, the *Polar Bear*. Notorious boat. But don't try to persuade me to give chase—the schooner is in extraterritorial waters. Today it will be in Alaska."

They gazed at the receding schooner and began smoking.

"Well, Comrade Los, we'll soon be saying good-bye. Maybe I'll drop in on the return voyage if I don't get caught in the ice," said the captain.

Soon the *Soviet* put into the roadstead and anchored off the coast facing a large native settlement. The steamer sounded its siren. A boat swiftly approached the ship.

"Los, Los, come here! Some of your Martians are coming," said Tolstukhin.

Los ran to the starboard side. He instantly recognized Zhukov among the native occupants of the boat. A joy-

ful smile lit up his face and he cried out at the top of his voice:

"Andrei! You're alive! That's grand! Come up here quick and let me give you a hug."

"In a minute, Nikita Sergeyevich!" replied Zhukov and clambered up the ladder.

Los caught Andrei in his embrace and almost crushed the breath out of him. Releasing his vice-like grip he stepped back a pace and flinging out his arms, cried:

"Well, it does my heart good to see you! I feel as though I had come home!"

"I've been expecting you a long time, Nikita Sergeyevich. Even started to miss you."

"And those men who have come out with you—are they decent fellows?"

"They're friends, Nikita Sergeyevich. I've already managed to make a lot of friends here. They're a wonderful people!"

"Fine, that's fine! Let's go and get acquainted, scout."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Winter had not yet set in, but the strait was already heavily blocked with ice. The Arctic summer might not have been, so swiftly had it passed.

Heavy snowfalls, followed by keen north winds, set in. A blizzard sprang up. The dwellings were buried in huge snowdrifts.

Among the native yarangs there appeared the new hut of the Revcom commissioner, which, being of a square shape, was snowed under more heavily than the streamline yarangs. Very soon it was completely buried and the smoke from its chimney seemed to be coming up from under the snow.

"It's good that we're snowed under," said Zhukov. "It's warmer with the snow, seeing we can't keep the place properly heated."

The *Soviet*, in its hurry to reach Kolyma, had not had time to unload all the supplies required by the Revcom. The captain had promised to land the rest of the cargo on his way back, but the steamer had not shown up, and there was no means of ascertaining what had happened to it. It had either passed them or become icebound.

The Chukotsk Revcom's premises consisted of fifteen square metres of floor space. The back part of the hut served as living quarters. Here, divided only by a little bedside table, stood the two cots of Los and Zhukov, partitioned off from the rest of the hut by a bright calico curtain. The official premises were somewhat more impressive. Here stood two writing desks, a couple of bentwood chairs and a homemade bench.

Against the wall near the door stood a cupboard fastened on a large padlock and sealed. This was the letter box, as witnessed by the drawing of a specimen addressed envelope over the slit with the following address written in a calligraphic hand:

Petropavlovsk-on-Kamchatka
Gubernia Revcom.

Representative of Kamchatka Gubernia Revcom
for the Chukotsk Region
No. 123

This gigantic letter box was to be opened only upon the arrival of a steamer, when the navigation season began.

It was cold in the Revcom office. Coal was used only for cooking. Los, clad in a reindeer jacket and loose fur

trousers, with an old Red Army cloth helmet sitting tight on his head, sat bent over his desk. A full-grown blond beard covered his chest.

Los, with head lowered, was wrapped in thought, as though struggling with some difficult problem. Now and again he raised his head, and a pair of bright blue eyes looked out from under bushy overhanging brows.

Zhukov was pacing up and down the little room talking about the local inhabitants. He, too, was dressed very warm. His fur torbazes were strapped to his belt and a warm foxskin cap with long flaps reaching to his waist added height to his tall figure.

"What you're telling me, Andrei, is very interesting," said Los, listening to the blizzard howling outside.

Los had once been a good engine driver, but ever since he had parted with his armoured train he had had no more occasion to see a locomotive. Once, on passing the railway station in Vladivostok Los had stopped near the track and stood listening a long time to the distant hooting of Soviet locomotives in various places along the Pacific coast. And now, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean he was listening to the howling of the blizzard and the crashing of the pack ice.

"Andrei, what instructions did you receive from the Revcom on coming out here?"

"The main thing, Nikita Sergeyevich, was to first get acquainted with the region and the population. That's what Volny, the Revcom Chairman, told me—get acquainted with the people for the time being and make a note of all the traders."

"So communication with Petropavlovsk by dog trail is possible, it seems?"

Zhukov smiled.

"Of course. I came that way. But for practical purposes it's useless. It took me four months."

Los chewed his beard, then said:

"How the devil are we going to live here? From one steamer to the next? We must get a wireless outfit. . . . Well, Andrei, go on."

Zhukov began pacing the room again and continued:

"This outlying region was not included in the administrative system until just before the Revolution. The tsarist county chief made an attempt in 1915 to set up village elders, but nothing came of it. He was more interested in the furs out of the government stores and drank like a fish. The Cossacks weren't any better than their chief. Before he died in 1916 of delirium tremens Dyadenko, the county chief, ordered his body to be buried on a hill overlooking Providence Bay, so that he could see the passing ships."

"He must have been one of my countrymen, a canny Ukrainian," said Los with an amused smile.

"The country was governed according to unwritten laws by a bunch of unscrupulous hucksters. There are adventurers here from Alaska, too."

"We'll drive 'em out!" said Los determinedly.

"They are men of all kinds of nationalities," went on Zhukov. "Norwegians, Danes, Americans, Letts, Ossetians, Russians, Ingushes, Ukrainians. There's a German and an Austrian Baptist—an ex-prisoner of war. Many of them have married Chukchi and Eskimo women and settled down. By establishing blood relations with the natives they are better able to carry on their trade. The local kulaks act as middlemen between them and the large nomad group of reindeer herders. They all lead a secluded life and have dealing only with the schooners that come from Alaska. . . ."

"Never mind! We'll sweep all that refuse out of here, Andrei. But I can see you've got the proper hang of things out here."

"I made a study of the region from Tan-Bogoraz's books while in Petrograd."

Los replenished the stove sparingly and raked up the coals.

"What particularly struck me here, Nikita Sergeyevich, is these people's extraordinary love for children. Grown-ups talk to children as though they are equals. Oddly enough, they even consult them sometimes. I get on well with the kiddies—that's one of the reasons I've made so many friends among the hunters and the old men."

That evening Los busied himself with pen and paper. When he had finished writing he folded up the paper neatly and handed it to Zhukov.

"That's for the mail—about means of communication. Leave yourself a copy. We'll need the copies when it comes to drawing up the annual report."

Zhukov went through the outgoing mail, put it into an envelope and dropped it in the letter box.

A group of youngsters and a young girl came running unembarrassedly into the Revcom house.

"Sit down, sit down!" cried Los, moving up the bench.

"These are my pupils, Nikita Sergeyevich. Some of them have learned to read a little. Maybe they'll become Komsomols,* eh?"

"Of course they will!"

Hearing the barking of a passing dog-team the children rushed outside.

"You just said they might become Komsomols, Andrei. But we can't even organize a Party or Komsomol group. I'm the only Communist Party member here, and you're the only Komsomol member. Such a huge country—bigger than Europe. But we'll make Commu-



* Young Communist League members.—*Trans.*

nists and Komsomols out of them, mark my word! It's too bad, though, that we haven't any means of communication.... All our reports and enquiries will not leave that 'letter box' until next summer, and we shan't get replies until the year after that. That's the trouble, my friend! Talk of getting things done snappily! This is not like dashing about in an armoured train," said the Revcom commissioner with a rueful smile, and throwing his fur parka over his shoulders he went outside.

Los, too, was fond of children, and the latter were not long in taking to this bearded big man. They would romp about him in a crowd, shouting:

"Russki Los! Russki Los!"

He would seize some little urchin in his huge hands and toss him up in the air or hold him over his head, while the women would gaze at this unusual scene from the doorways of their yarangs, smiling into the broad sleeves of their parkas.

Los, for all his good humour and apparent phlegm, was a man of great will power, swift decisions and irresistible energy.

The name of this daring commander of the armoured train in the civil war had struck terror into the hearts of a cruel and crafty enemy. The Japanese interventionists, too, had experienced the taste of his swift and terrible attacks. He had been in many difficult and dangerous situations, but he had always contrived to emerge with flying colours.

But here, in this new and unusual situation, he felt as though he were tied hand and foot.

Los keenly felt his ignorance of the language too. He was distressingly aware of this handicap which prevented him from having a heart to heart talk with the people, telling them about the Soviet Government, about what it thought of doing, and the best way of organizing life in this region.

"Andrei, I can't go out of the house without you," he would say to Zhukov. "Come on! Let's have a chat with the people."

People would gather in some large yarang and they would sit talking into the early hours of morning with Zhukov acting as interpreter.

The next day the news gathered from this talk would fly from mouth to mouth all along the coast, being conveyed by the local "torbaz telegraph" from camp to camp and hunter to hunter.

The Russian chief was known to people who lived in the remotest spots along the coast and who had never yet set eyes on him.

Los doggedly studied Chukchi, over which he spent whole days and sometimes nights. His vocabulary notebook had become so voluminous that reference to it always entailed a long search. Los rearranged the words and phrases according to a new classification of his own, for which purpose he rewrote the whole notebook. He now had two books. In one he wrote down the words in alphabetical order, in the other he wrote out conversational phrases under special headings, such as: "General Conversation," "Trade Conversation," "Conversation on Dogs," and many other stock phrases for all occasions.

Los was the first to wake up in the morning, when he would shout to his friend and secretary:

"Andrei, time to get up! You'll sleep yourself into a scurvy!"

And, still lying in their fur sleeping bags with only their heads thrust out, they would put their caps on and begin the working day.

"Well, Andrei, check up my lessons."

And Los would roll off his new acquisition of Chukchi words and phrases: klyaul—man, neusket—woman, haimychilen—rich man, vyletkurken klyaul—trading man, and so on.

“Well, how am I getting on, Andrei?”

“Quite good, Nikita Sergeyevich! Much better than I expected.”

“You wait, my dear fellow! I’ll soon be delivering a lecture in Chukchi. How do you say ‘go away’ in Chukchi?”

“Kanto.”

“Ah, kanto off then! Go and make arrangements about the sledges. We’re going out to the coast today to hold elections to the Settlement Committees and Tribal Soviets. Meanwhile, I’ll make some fritters. We’ll soon forget what bread tastes like.”

“I’ve been told that Thompson bakes his bread over an oil lamp. I wanted to try it but never had time,” said Zhukov.

Los dressed himself and began poking the stove.

“Kanto off, hurry up!” he repeated with a smile. “I’ll remember that word now!”

CHAPTER NINE

Mr. Simons lounged easily in Mr. Thompson’s rocking chair, smoking fragrant Capstan. Mr. Simons was the North Company’s local representative in charge of the fur trading post. He acted simultaneously as fur buyer, salesman, warehouseman and clerk, and believed that one man was more than enough to cope with these duties. Time hung heavily on his hands. A spare blond man of thirty with a cold haughty face and lacklustre eyes, he was disgusted with everything here and often regretted the impulse that induced him to come out to this “savage” country for the sake of high pay. He hated the hunters, he hated their clothes and their smiling faces. He was even glad that they rarely visited his trading post, little suspecting that this was Thompson’s and Alitet’s handiwork.

Mr. Simons had the fastidious habit of wrapping his handkerchief round the door handle before touching it to enter a place.

It was already the height of winter and Mr. Simons felt bored to death. Three months had passed since the *Beachaimo* had weighed anchor after having set Mr. Simons ashore together with a hastily assembled house and store and stocks for the trading post.

The loneliness would have been unendurable were it not for the society of Charles Thompson, the only other civilized man in the place. Luckily Mr. Thompson was staying another year. At least he had someone to talk to in the long winter evenings.

Every morning, on awakening, Mr. Simons leisurely dressed himself and went to Mr. Thompson's shanty. Not even a blizzard could detain him. A rope ran from the North Company's trading post to Mr. Thompson's dwelling and Mr. Simons held on to it when he made his way in the dark.

He had his meals with Mr. Thompson. In the morning they would drink coffee and eat tinned fruits. Then Mr. Simons would listen to Mr. Thompson's stories, or they would play a game of patience, and on Sundays wind up the gramophone. And so they beguiled the long northern hours from day to day by the light of a solitary oil lamp. On taking his leave Mr. Simons would say with an ironical smile:

"Good-bye, Thompson—time's money you know!"

One evening, when Simons had brought a bottle of whisky for supper, they sat chatting for a long time like old friends.

"Mary!" called Charlie. "Some more coffee."

Mary was surprised. It was always her mother who served the coffee. She slipped on a dress and went into the room.

"Bring a cup for yourself and sit down to the table with us. It's Sunday today," her father said.

Charlie had never invited his daughter to the table before. Mary was bewildered. She couldn't understand it.

"Come on, sit down," her father said, taking her hand.

"Very pretty daughter you have, Thompson," said Simons drily. "Does she speak English?"

"No," answered Thompson ruefully.

The gramophone was playing. Mr. Simons' hard stare made Mary feel uncomfortable. She hastily finished her coffee and suddenly darted to the door.

"Oh, don't go, Miss Mary—aren't we going to dance?"

But Mary had already disappeared.

"She doesn't dance, Simons."

"She should be taught then. A girl ought to be able to dance. I can give her some lessons...."

They lit up their pipes and smoked in silence.

"Well, Simons, coming back to what I was saying—I simply can't make out why the North Company has been given the monopoly of trade here. Monopolies debar competition and trade can't exist without competition."

"I agree with you there, Thompson. But you're forgetting one thing—we're dealing with the Russian ministry of trade. Everything is now monopolized in Soviet Russia. Private enterprise practically doesn't exist any more." Mr. Simons got up and spread his hands with a hopeless gesture. "There's nothing we can do about it. We're not the bosses here."

"But how are businessmen going to live in Russia?"

Mr. Simons' shrug was eloquent of his utter lack of ideas on that score.

That evening their talk was of a particularly cordial nature.

"So what are your plans for the future, Thompson?"

"I'll probably go back to the States next summer."

"Well, naturally. I could never understand, Thomp-

son, now you could have spent the best part of your life out here. In this little hole of a room, without a bath, without a car, without flowers! I can't imagine it. . . . My wife died, I'm childless—that's the only reason which induced me to take on this job—that and, of course, the big pay attached to it. But heaven forbid I should stay on here another year! Half a lifetime! It's awful, Thompson!"

"Oh, a fellow gets used to it, Simons. Has your wife been dead long?"

"Two years. I'm all alone in the world now. I intend to make a little on this job and go to Canada and set up in business. And you, Thompson—have you put by anything for a rainy day, if it isn't a business secret?"

"My business days are over, Simons." Thompson fell silent, then resumed: "To be frank, I've taken a liking to you. Your company has given me great pleasure this year, Simons. You're a real good guy. I don't mind taking you into my confidence."

Mr. Thompson got up and walked over to his strong-box. He paused halfway and said:

"You're the first man, not counting the bank clerks, to learn how much I've got."

Mr. Thompson unlocked the box and drew out a sheaf of papers which he laid on the table with trembling hands, saying in a voice full of emotion:

"I hope you won't abuse an old man's confidence, Simons."

Mr. Simons hastily drew his chair up.

"Here, take a look. A hundred thousand dollars in one bank, not counting interest. The same sum in another bank. And thirty-seven thousand in a third. Not a cent more anywhere."

Mr. Simons gasped.

"Why, you're worth a quarter of a million, Thompson!"

"No, Simons," said Thompson with a sigh. "I tried hard to bring it up to that figure but didn't manage it!"

"Oh, a mere thirteen thousand short—that doesn't count!"

"Still, a nice round figure's better to look at, Simons!"

Thompson replaced the papers in his strongbox and said:

"Would you care for some more coffee?"

"No, thanks, Thompson. It's getting late."

Mr. Simons' sleep was restless that night. He spun brightly coloured dreams of marrying Mary.

CHAPTER TEN

The new trading post, like Thompson's buildings, stood on the seashore. Mr. Simons' house communicated with the store by a narrow passage. The arrangements were very convenient for the North Company's representative who had everything close at hand. The store was well stocked with trade goods and Mr. Simons had long since put everything in perfect order.

Mr. Simons did not know the Chukchi language, nor did he have any intention of learning it. He spoke a little Russian, however. In his dealings with the natives Yarak acted as his interpreter.

The day's trading over, Mr. Simons closed his store and betook himself to Thompson's house. After a good dinner Mr. Thompson, excusing himself, stepped out into the passage and said to his daughter:

"Mary, you'll go to Mr. Simons today and take dancing lessons."

"I won't go to Sime! I don't need lessons! I can dance better than Sime," she answered pertly.

"You're the daughter of an American father! You must dance the American way, not like a savage!"

With which peremptory command he returned to his room.

Yarak came in at that moment and announced:

"The Russian chief with the big beard has arrived. He's standing out there by his sledge."

Mr. Simons hurried out.

Outside the trading post stood two sledges surrounded by a crowd of hunters.

"Ah, Mr. Los! The Governor!" Simons hailed him from afar, and hurrying forward he shook hands heartily with him and Zhukov.

"Zdrastvuite, zdrastvuite,* Mr. Simons! Haven't seen you a long time—ever since last summer," said Los.

"Please come into the house. Make your own arrangements about fixing up the dogs—you'll do it better than I can."

"I'll see to the dogs," said Yarak.

"See that they're fed well," Andrei told him.

"I will feed them very well!"

The American's wooden house looked a solid enough building, though obviously not made to last. The rooms were clean, cosy and airy with brand-new comfortable furniture. By the bedside lay the skin of a grizzly bear, while the white skin of a polar bear was thrown over the back of an armchair. The white bearskin was a gift from Mr. Thompson. On the writing desk Zhukov saw a pile of American magazines and he was soon deeply immersed in them.

Los paced up and down the room which he examined from floor to ceiling. Tapping the wall he enquired ironically:

"Warm?"

"Very warm, Mr. Los!"

"Smart fellows, you Americans! Rig up a house that

* How do you do (Russian).—*Trans.*

will last three years—exactly the term of your agreement—not a day more or less. When the agreement runs out the house will fall to pieces.”

“Oh no, it won’t, Mr. Los—it’s a good strong house. This house will stand for twenty years!”

“Twenty? Would you like to see me push the wall in with my shoulder? We don’t build like that in Russia.”

“You could knock an elephant over, Mr. Los! But the house is all right—double inch boards, walls lined with cardboard and papered....”

While he was talking Mr. Simons had lit the stove, sliced some bacon, put out the butter and laid the table amid a clatter of knives, forks and plates. He was very deft with his hands.

“Under the terms of the agreement the North Company was to build schools and hospitals besides business premises,” Los said, speaking to himself as it were. “I wonder if they’re going to be built of boards too?”

Mr. Simons stopped in the middle of the room with a plate in his hand.

“But, Mr. Los, you know that the *Beachaimo* was stowed with trading post buildings and commercial cargo. True, our firm owns a big fleet and they could have sent another steamer, but this is their first experience in Arctic navigation. A trial voyage. The North Company’s a firm of good standing, Mr. Los, and I’m sure that next year will see those buildings stipulated in the agreement standing on the coast.... Please, sit down!” Simons concluded with a gesture of invitation.

The Revcom men after a bite and a chat on trading affairs were conducted by Mr. Simons into the store.

Here Los examined the neatly packed cartridges and the Winchesters, sniffed the aromatic tobaccos and admired the fine ladies’ underwear. Plug tobacco was wrapped up in tinfoil and waxed paper like bars of chocolate. Los was struck by the lavish selection of hard-

ware and ironware and the varied assortment of textile goods.

Mr. Simons drew Los' attention to two papers hanging on the wall.

"Here are our price lists, Mr. Los! This one is for furs, the other for trade goods."

Los went up to the wall and began reading aloud:

"Brick tea . . . but where's the price?" he asked.

"Oh, the edge of that sheet is torn," said Mr. Simons, and he swiftly pulled out a portable typewriter with Russian type, placed it on the counter and typed out the missing figures. The price list read:

Brick tea	1 ruble
Winchester	80 rubles
Cartridges, 20	2 rubles
Flour, 40 lbs	7 rubles

The list was a long one and it took Los some time to go through it.

"Very good! And this one's for furs?" he said.

White fox, 1st grade	40 rubles
White fox, 2nd grade	32 rubles
Blue fox, 1st grade	80 rubles
Seal, each	1 ruble

Los studied the price list to the end, went over to the counter and sat down on a package of brick tea. The North Company's representative keenly followed his every movement.

"It's all very good, but useless," said Los with a sigh. "There isn't a single hunter who can read or write. Who are these price lists intended for?"

Simons shrugged and spread his hands.

Yarak came into the store followed by five hunters.

"Not now, not now! Clear out!" said Mr. Simons in Russian, waving them back to the door.

"That's all right, Mr. Simons, they're not in the way," said Zhukov.

"What they need, Mr. Simons, is a live price list, not a dead one," said Los.

"I don't follow you."

"Let's take this package of brick tea—80 bricks. It costs 80 rubles. Now lay two white foxes on it at 40 rubles each. Or the Winchester—place two white pelts under that too. A package of twenty cartridges on two sealskins—they cost a ruble each and the cartridges cost 2 rubles. That'll be clear even to an illiterate hunter."

The hunters for some reason don't bring any fox pelts, Mr. Los. I haven't traded more than a couple of dozen. With what are we going to make such an illustrated price list?"

"Quite enough. Let's have them here!"

Los threw off his parka and began breaking open cases and ripping open packages of tea, and soon the whole side wall of the store was transformed into a peculiar form of combined showcase and price list. Zhukov explained to the hunters that they could get forty bricks of tea for one white fox. The hunters were dumbfounded—whoever heard of such a thing?

"Kakomei, kakomei!" they cried in amazement.

The hunters rushed off to their yarangs, unearthed pelts which had lain hidden until such time as the trading man would be in a good trading mood, and brought them into the store.

One of the hunters handed Los two white fox skins and said:

"Can I have a Winchester for them?"

"Of course you can," Zhukov answered for him. "But Los is not a trading man. He has only given orders that trade should be carried on in this way. Give the pelts to him," and he pointed to Simons.

Mr. Simons took the pelts in his hands, examined them, shook them out and said:

"Very good skins. What does he want?" On being told he took down a 30×30 calibre Winchester and handed it to the hunter.

The latter took it irresolutely, gazed round at everybody and asked:

"Do I still owe anything for this rifle? Won't I be asked to pay more fox pelts for it later on?"

"No, it's fully paid for. Don't you see how it's shown there on the wall?" And Zhukov explained the new price list once more.

The store began to do a roaring trade. Hunters came running out of their yarangs with fox skins to be bartered in the new way. The news flew to every dwelling and spread like wildfire up and down the coast.

"Do you see, Mr. Simons? And you thought that the trapping season had not begun. You wait, I'll ride up the coast—you'll be flooded with pelts. It's all very simple. No one has ever traded with them fairly, the way you intend to do," said Los, and there was a tinge of irony in his tone.

"I'm greatly obliged to you, Mr. Los! You'll be a great help to me in organizing trade here."

After spending the day in the store of the trading post the Revcom men went back to Mr. Simons' room.

"This is a barbarous way of trading, Mr. Los, say what you like!" said Simons.

"That's true. But you wait until we get schools up here and teach the people to read and write—it'll be an entirely different kind of trade then. We'll introduce money and put an end to this barter system. But for the present ... we've got to adapt ourselves to conditions. We Bolsheviks are practical people. ... Hello! What's this I see here—Russian records?" Los exclaimed suddenly.

"They're American records, Mr. Los, but sung in

Russian and Ukrainian," observed Mr. Simons deferentially.

Los gave himself up to the enjoyment of his native Ukrainian songs to which he sat listening for a long time. They brought back to him the memories of home and made him feel sad.

Los got up and paced the room. He stopped beside Zhukov, who was glancing through an American magazine. One whole page was filled with a striking illustration of an automobile tyre.

"What's this wheel about, Mr. Simons?" asked Los. "What's the writing say?"

"It gives an interesting story, Mr. Los, about two sweethearts who spent a month in a car riding through wild jungles and underbrush and along stony riverbanks, and after the journey the tyres did not show the slightest signs of wear. They were stronger than ever. Buy Our Tyres!"

Los burst out laughing.

"Well, turn over the next page, Andrei," he said with a chuckle.

The next page carried a picture of ladies' stockings.

"Is there a story here too, Mr. Simons?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Los!"

"What pictures, what paper! And all that propaganda just for the sake of selling a pair of ladies' stockings!" thought Los, remembering the army newspapers which they used to print at the front on brown packing paper.

Mr. Simons put on a new record. A tenor's melodious voice sang wistfully of the memories of life's golden hours. Here in the north, far from the noisy crowds the song struck a sentimental chord even in Los. He stood chewing his beard, his blue eyes half closed.

"That's a fine song! Wonderful thing a gramophone is, when you come to think of it! Well, that'll do, Andrei, send someone for Mr. Thompson," said Los.

Los was wearing a military tunic and a Red Army cloth helmet with a big five-pointed star in front. In that helmet he looked like one of the sturdy heroes of ancient Russian legend.

Charles Thompson came in looking nervous and flustered. He had reason to fear Los.

"Good evening!" he said in a small voice.

"Dobri vecher, dobri vecher,* Mr. Thompson!" Mr. Simons answered him and invited him to take off his outer garments.

"Mr. Thompson," began Los, "I suppose Mr. Simons has told you that all the trade here is now handled by the North Company?"

"Oh yes," said Mr. Thompson anxiously, when Zhukov had translated this to him.

"Yet I've been told that you are still buying furs from the local trappers. Is that correct?"

Charles Thompson was silent for a while under Los' searching gaze.

"Please, Mr. Zhukoff, tell the commissioner that I really did collect forty-three white foxes and three red ones lately, but these were in payment of outstanding debts."

"Mr. Thompson, if I hear of your buying any more furs I shall impose a heavy fine on you," said Los sternly.

Thompson felt as though a load had been taken off his mind. He nodded his head in silence.

"The forty-six pelts which you have unlawfully purchased you will be good enough to deliver to the Revcom office. Give him a receipt for them, Andrei."

Charles Thompson looked greatly relieved. He had come off well.

* Good evening (Russian).—*Trans.*

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The team drivers came in the morning. Los asked Mr. Simons to give them tea and, putting on his travelling clothes, he went outside.

A fiery moon rose from behind the mountains, throwing into sharp relief the jagged ridges which looked like silhouettes pasted on the skyline. There was a crisp frost. A deep silence rested on everything around, broken only by the crunching of the snow under the padded tread of passers-by. The sound reverberated far and wide.

The icebound sea lay beneath a deep blue glacial canopy. Here and there lonely bergs loomed like silent sentinels. Not a sound was heard. Nature in her sternest mood seemed to be guarding this immense peace of the north.

"How quiet it is!" said Los straining his ears to catch the faintest sound.

Somewhere a dog began howling. Others joined their voices and soon the whole pack in the settlement had taken up the dismal chorus. The harrowing sounds made Los shiver. Suddenly the ululation broke off, and then again the thin wail of the song leader could be heard somewhere far away, and once more the chorus was taken up on all sides.

The team drivers ran to the sledges, shouting briskly: "Tagam! Tagam!"*

The dogs dashed off along the snowbound shore. Andrei and his team driver rode in the first sledge, Los in the second. They sat muffled up in their furs with hoods pulled low over their heads, leaving only a slit for the eyes, and consigned their lives into the hands of their drivers.

Los, listening to the crunch of the snow under the running sledge, was thinking: "I won't quit this place

* Forward.--*Trans.*

until I've changed the face of life in this grim country. Then Natasha can join me out here. She'll work as enthusiastically as that selfless lad Andrei Zhukov."

The dogs raced silent-footed along the rocky shore. The sledge glided smoothly over the flat surface of the snow-covered ice. A dry wind sprang up. Through the fur hood pulled tightly over his head Los caught a faint, oddly vibrating sound.

"Listen, Los!" shouted the driver. "The cliffs are singing!"

Every ledge and little crag on the overhanging cliff reacted to the impacts of the wind with a quaint little sound of its own, merging into a deep many-toned humming noise. It was the voice of the timeless rocks.

The wind swept a gritty spray down the face of the cliffs and it scattered over the ice with a metallic rustle. This driving blizzard of stone dust stung the face and blinded the eyes. The path of the sledges was strewn with fragments of rock that had broken off the cliff side—the work of incessant winds and the surf.

"Look, Los! That is a new point!" said the talkative driver. "A crag fell here. The noise of it was heard even in Loren. It crashed through the ice. A lot of stunned fish was thrown up. Men carried away sledges full of them."

Los gazed in wonder at the huge crag weighing thousands of tons. It presented a sight of rare beauty. It was as though someone had hewn out and polished a mass of stones but not yet laid them out.

In a gorge by the seashore stood a lone hunter's yarang. It looked forlorn and evoked a feeling of sadness in the onlooker.

"Why does he live here alone?" asked Los.

"He likes it," answered the driver.

At sight of the yarang the dogs ran forward at a spurt, anticipating the end of the journey. The team

drivers smoked and chatted a while with the owner of the solitary yarang, then proceeded on their way.

The dogs were reluctant to go on. They gazed at their master with pleading eyes. After trotting on half-heartedly for a dozen or so paces, they suddenly of one accord, as though sensing the crafty design of their leader, swerved sharply and doubled back on their tracks, making for the yarang. The team driver sunk his gee pole deep into the snow and brought the team to a halt. With a shout of command that brooked no denial the driver turned the dogs' heads in the required direction. Seeing they would not be allowed to spend the night here the dogs ran on obediently.

"Los," said the driver, "the man living in that yarang said the sea trail ahead of us is dangerous. A south wind recently broke the ice away from the coast and left only a narrow strip running fast by the cliffs. The other trail, across the hills, is in bad shape. It is heavily snowed under. The dogs will sink into it over their heads and will have to crawl on their stomachs. Shall we follow the coast trail? You are in a hurry, are you not? What say you?"

"You know best.... Decide yourself...." And Los thought to himself: "What advice can I give him?"

"We're going by the coast trail!" the driver shouted to his companion riding behind.

Los sat hunched in his sledge wrapped up in his bulky fur clothes like a bear. He could hardly turn his head.

"Yes," Los was thinking, "the drivers' clothes are much more comfortable and lighter than ours, and probably warmer too. I must make myself a suit like theirs." The drivers wore short, light parkas with snug-fitting fur trousers and short, neat torbazes on their feet. They enjoyed complete freedom of movement. In case of danger they could jump off the sledge in an instant.

The sledge plunged over the pack ice that encumbered the rock-bound coast. Los strained his eyes ahead, clutching the sides of the sledge or gripping the driver, which did not, however, save him from frequent spills. The drivers kept jumping on and off the sledges with an agility that was somewhat out of keeping with their habitual sluggishness. Now and then, the driver failing to pull the sledge aside in time, it would run into an ice pack and pull up with a jerk. The dogs would look round of one accord, saying to Los with eyes of reproach: "Get off the sledge!"

Shamed into obedience Los would clamber out of the sledge while the driver lifted it free of the ice pack.

The pack ice at last had ended and crevasses began to make their appearance in the ice, running from the cliffs towards the sea across their trail. The sea itself, black and turbid, was dangerously close. The dogs leapt the fissures one pair at a time, the long sledge gliding over the watery gaps and forming a sort of suspended little bridge across the clefts in the ice.

A south wind was blowing over the cliff tops, but here, down below, it swirled as in a chasm and swept down in fierce gusts from the north. The eddies were carried out to sea and set the sea pulsating. The answering surge could be felt under the heaving ice as the sledges passed over it.

But Los was calm. He had full confidence in his driver. Indeed, he had no say in the matter.

Soon the perilous spots had been passed. The dogs swept out onto a broad level stretch and the drivers brought their teams to a halt, lit up their pipes and joked about the past dangers.

"It's wonderful out here, Andrei! Look at the open spaces!"

"Yes, Nikita Sergeyeovich, I see you too are falling in love with the country. Why, even your hoary beard has

taken on the same colour as the landscape!" laughed Andrei.

The glimmer of dawn broke at noon.

"Andrei, let them ride together on the first sledge and you and I will follow behind. I'll try my hand at driving the dog-team while I'm at it," said Los.

The drivers readily fell in with this suggestion—they were dying to talk about these Russians whom they were driving far into the northernmost parts of their land.

The trail was excellent. The dogs, to Los' chagrin, trotted on without the slightest interference on his part. He even had no excuse to shout at them.

"Nikita Sergeyevich, why shouldn't we start at once organizing the Tribal Soviets?"

"Because, my dear friend, you don't want to remember a good old proverb which says, 'Look before you leap.' "

"But, Nikita Sergeyevich, this Chukotsk realm of ours is so vast that we can spend five years looking it over and never find the time to leap."

"No, Comrade Zhukov, you're wrong! We start taking the leap on our way back, not before. Can't you see that the main point is that we have shown ourselves to them and made their acquaintance and now we must give them a chance to talk it over and digest it. And they've plenty to talk about, let me tell you. D'you think that price list was a joke? No, sir, that was a piece of revolution! That price list will give a nasty jolt to that ginger spider Thompson, and that slyboots Simons and the rascal Alitet and many others. We have now shown the hunters and trappers that their pelts are worth something. They won't take long to grasp it. Don't you worry!"

The dogs ran smoothly and Los, now thoroughly convinced that they could dispense with his guidance, turned his back on them.

"Nikita Sergeyevich, did you take notice of Yarak? An interesting lad. He wasn't very trustful of me at first. 'Those white men are all alike', he told Aye. Then he became a different man. He even made me a gift of his goggles. I had long talks with him last winter. He worked as hired man for Thompson. And Thompson's daughter—Mary—a real Chukchi girl, has set her heart on Yarak. When Thompson found it out he drove him out of the house. I told Yarak about the Soviet law, and one day he turned up with Mary to register their marriage. A handsome girl, with a graceful figure! Quite, you know...." Andrei made an eloquent gesture.

"Well," said Los, greatly interested.

"But you know I have no certificate forms or any seal. And I don't know the formalities, either."

"Well, what happened?"

"Nothing happened. They went back without registering."

Los pulled up the sledge with a jerk, jumped out and shouted, his rime-covered beard wagging with indignation:

"You're a fathead, Andrei! And what a fathead! What the devil did you need a form for? It may take five years before you get a supply of those forms! Here you have a revolution in social customs shoved right into your pocket and you make a fuss about forms!"

"All right, there's no need to go off the deep end! As if it can't be mended. We'll put it right on our way back," said Andrei.

"Let them come to me. You'll see how I'll fix it up. All that's needed is brains."

The sledge ahead of them was no longer visible. Los whooped at the dogs and they broke into a gallop.

"And what was the name of that other lad at Enmakai you were telling me about?"

"Vaamcho."

"That's right, Vaamcho. That's where Alitet lives, isn't it? We'll stop at Alitet's place when we get there—I'd like to see what sort of a bird he is."

"Now, that's where you're wrong!" said Andrei.

"Why?"

"We shouldn't hobnob with Alitet! On the contrary, we ought to make it a point of snubbing him and showing respect for Vaamcho. It doesn't matter that Vaamcho has a small and dirty yarang."

"You're right there, Andrei. So we're quits!" said Los with a chuckle and digged his friend in the ribs.

The wind had veered and was now blowing from the north, sweeping low over the ground. Night fell.

The leading sledge came to a stop. One of the drivers came up to the Russians and said:

"Andrei, go back to your sledge. There is going to be a blizzard. Look, the moon has put a white shirt on. I must drive this team myself."

Los settled back in the sledge and became lost in thought.

An impassable mass of pack ice barring their path the drivers turned the dogs off the trail and rode towards the hills.

The blizzard broke.

Myriads of snowflakes swirled in the air, forming a dense pall.

Through the howling fury of this eddying sea of snow Los could see nothing of the leading sledge, not even the dogs of his own team. "Well, Los, it seems this is going to be your first real taste of the north," he thought as he pulled his hood down lower.

"Oi, a man must be careful here. A man can be killed!" shouted the driver. "There are cliffs here. Very high ones!"

The blizzard piled up hanging snowdrifts that clung to the edge of the precipices, and woe to him who rode unwittingly over that treacherous ledge. It sometimes

happened that man and dogs, having lost their way in a blizzard, hurtled to their death over the precipice and were buried beneath the avalanche of snow.

The team drivers latched both sledges together and rode on at a careful pace in single line. Now and again they would stop and take counsel.

The dogs stumbled gropingly in the pitch dark. The drivers turned them slightly into the wind where they thought the trail lay. One of the drivers walked on ahead and continually threw out his gee pole which he held attached to a rope. If the rope "ran out" there instantly followed a warning cry: "Stop!" That meant there was a precipice here, and both drivers went in search of the trail, leaving the sledges waiting behind.

They had been gone for a very long time. The dogs were snowed under. They curled up and went to sleep.

Los frequently consulted his watch.

"It's half an hour already," he said.

"They'll come back all right!" Andrei said confidently, not sure himself whether they would.

"This watch Simons gave me is a handy thing in a blizzard. A luminous dial. Like a wolf's eye. And only costs a dollar. A poor man's watch. Won't go for more than a year. Smart fellows, those Americans!" said Los.

Time seemed to them an eternity as they sat in the sledges waiting for the drivers.

"They certainly are a long time," said Andrei with a note of anxiety in his voice.

"Perhaps they've lost us?"

"Shouldn't be surprised!" Andrei stood up in the sledge and began shouting: "Ehe-e-ci! Ehe-e-ei!"

But his voice was carried away by the storm.

"Let's shout together, Nikita Sergeyevich!"

"Best thing would be to fire a shot. My driver has a Winchester here."

Los picked up a battered old Winchester that lay in

the sledge with bits of walrus thong tied about it to prevent it from falling to pieces. But try as he might he could not get it to shoot.

"This firearm's probably a hundred years old. You've got to know its secret. . . . That's what comes of listening to your advice. Why the devil didn't I take my revolver?"

"They don't like it when a man goes about with a revolver, Nikita Sergeyevich. They think—now a rifle is for killing game, but what is a little gun for? For killing men?"

"Nonsense! Now here's when a revolver would have come in handy. . . . Anyway, what are we going to do if they've lost us?"

"Sit here until the storm blows over."

"And say it lasts five days?"

"It may last ten—makes no difference."

At this moment a shout was suddenly heard in the darkness:

"The trail! Here's the trail!"

The team drivers ran up to the sledges.

"Who the devil says there's a trail here!" cried Los. Yet his spirits soared.

The drivers dragged the dogs out from under the snow. They shook themselves and the sledges went racing down a steep incline.

"Los!" the driver cried gaily. "This is Whale Jaws gorge. Down below is the Enmakai settlement."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Los barely managed to squeeze into old Vaal's little yarang. Stretched out in the polog his body occupied the full length of the apartment.

Alek, the young mistress, thrown into a flutter as she was by this surprising visit, did not forget that tea had

to be made. She stepped over Los and filled the kettle with chips of ice.

It was beyond belief that the Russian chief, of whom so many rumours were rife all along the coast, should now be lying here, in this very yarang. Who could have dreamed of such a distinguished person visiting old Vaal's yarang of all places? It was simply amazing! For never had the foot of a Tang stepped over the threshold of this dwelling. What could it mean? Was it mockery? Or had he simply taken refuge here from the blizzard?

Such were the thoughts that troubled both Alek and old man Vaal. He puttered about the room not knowing what to do. He crawled out into the little passage and came back with a skin in his hands which he held up to the light. In a considerable perturbation he beat the skin out with a reindeer rib and turned to Los, saying:

"Move up a little, I will put this skin under you. It is softer."

But Los did not understand the old man. He delved into his notebook dictionary, but, as luck would have it, could find nothing suitable to the occasion. Then old Vaal began explaining with the help of signs.

"A-ah! I understand! I understand!" said Los good-humouredly and rolled over on his side.

Vaal quickly slipped the skin into place.

Andrei came in and with the unconstraint of custom lay down beside Los.

Not even Andrei's entrance could set old Vaal at his ease. He fussed about and did not know what to do for his guests' further comfort.

"Sit down, old man! Let us talk," said Los.

Andrei began to act the interpreter.

But how could one talk with one's mind all in a whirl. Who could understand why the bearded Russian chief had



stopped at Vaal's yarang? Quite nearby was Alitet's yarang which was as spacious as the tundra and as light as under the sun and where there were good sleeping skins and food in abundance. Did not the Russians perhaps wish Vaal harm?

With a face that betrayed nothing of the turmoil his mind was thrown in the old man took stealthy stock of the Russians and, his eyes meeting those of Los, he thought: "They are kind eyes, like those of a reindeer—not wolf's eyes."

His fears somewhat allayed, the old man began cleaning out his pipe.

"Here, take some of my tobacco, old man!" said Los, handing him a tin of Prince Albert's.

The old man chuckled softly, stole a look at Alek, then at the guests, and reached out for the tin in some confusion. He lit his pipe, then cried:

"Alek, do you see what tobacco Vaal is smoking? A-a-ai! That is the wife of my son Vaamcho," he added, pointing his pipe at her. "He has gone to the neighbours. He will soon be back."

Vaal paused, then turning to Andrei he asked in a whisper:

"Has the Russian chief lost his way in our settlement? Alitet's yarang, you know, is close by. Quite close."

"We know that," answered Andrei. "But the chief said: 'We shall stop at a yarang where good people live. I hear that old man Vaal is a good man. To him we shall go.' The chief himself said that."

The old man nodded approvingly. It rang true. Old Vaal knew his own worth. He drew closer to Los, gripped his forearm and shook it in silent gratitude.

"Alek, the guests have come in from the cold, after a journey. It is time to give them tea," he said in a cheerful bustling tone.

Alek moved up the little table and brought out cups.

"You have few cups, Alek. There is a scarcity of cups in all the yarangs. That is why we always carry ours with us," said Andrei, placing two mugs on the table.

Vaamcho, his face nipped red by the frost, came into the yarang.

"Ah, here's our old friend!" cried Andrei, holding out his hand. "How long is it since we last met? You must have forgotten me, eh?"

"No," muttered Vaamcho gruffly.

He was no less perplexed by the presence of the guests than the old man. But the memory of his first meeting with Andrei made him brighten up. The thought flashed through his mind: "Maybe it is not out of fun they have come to visit me? Last time, too, he did not want to stay with Charlie Red Nose."

"They are good guests, Vaamcho, good guests!" the old man hastened to reassure him, guessing his son's state of mind.

"How is the hunting, Vaamcho?" asked Los, consulting his notebook.

Vaamcho spun round at the sudden question and a smile flitted across his face. Los' Chukchi pronunciation was very amusing.

"This is Los, the chief," explained Andrei.

"There is some hunting. There are some little seals," replied Vaamcho.

"How many white foxes have you trapped?"

"Four. Good foxes! If I took them to the new Merican I would get a lot of goods for them. It is said that he does good trading."

"Andrei, ask him why he hasn't sold his pelts yet?"

On being asked Vaamcho shook his head.

"They are not mine," he began. They have been caught in Alitet's traps. He gave them without payment. And I had to take goods from him without payment. I owe him three skins."

The face of the Russian chief darkened. The old man felt uneasy.

At that moment Alitet himself came into the yarang.

"Good day, Russki chief! Why does Russki chief lie in a little polog? A little polog bad, a big one good. I have room for you in my yarang," purred Alitet, interspersing his speech with Russian words.

Old Vaal listened to this speech in great distress. The Russians would now get up laughing and leave his yarang.

"My yarang is a good one, a big one," went on Alitet. "Russki soup with salt. Young reindeer meat, much, very much. Ai, very tasty food!"

"No, we are staying with Vaal, and here we remain," said Andrei firmly.

"What do my ears hear?" thought Vaal with a leap of the heart. "It would seem then that the Russians truly believe Vaal to be a worthy person?" and his eyes sought Vaamcho's. Vaamcho, too, felt as though a load had been taken off his mind.

Los watched Alitet's every gesture and almost hung on his lips, closely studying the man. He had heard a good deal about Alitet and his doings, and now, as he watched his shifty ferret eyes and listened to his smooth-tongued fawning speeches his ire began to rise.

"What does he say?" asked Los.

Andrei translated what Alitet had said, whereupon Los scrambled to his feet and said sharply, his beard quivering:

"Tell him that the Russian chief wishes to stay with honest men and not with thieves who steal foxes out of other men's traps."

When this was translated old Vaal drew a quick surprised gasp. "Where had the Russian chief learned this truth?"

"Russki chief is angry chief. Our people like to talk softly. Merican man also speaks softly," replied Alitet.

"I'll have something to say to you tomorrow about your trading with the contraband American schooner. That kind of trade is also theft. D'you get me?"

Alitet's eyes darted about uneasily. He wanted to say something when Los rapped out sternly:

"Kanto!"

The word acted like magic. Alitet disappeared in a flash.

"Well, that's one word that's come in useful," said Los with a smile. "I didn't forget that word, Andrei!"

Vaal said in a whisper:

"Now Alitet will not help Vaal's yarang. He will take the traps away as well."

"That's all right, old man. The Soviet Government will help you. I will help you."

"We don't want Alitet's help!" said Vaamcho angrily.

"Quite right, Vaamcho! I'll appoint you chairman of the Tribal Soviet here and you'll be yourself chief in this settlement."

And they sat in Vaal's yarang till late in the night talking about the Tribal Soviet, about what it meant and what its functions were to be.

Alitet, over supper in his yarang, roundly scolded the Russian chief. Tygrena sat listening and was secretly elated that there appeared to be some Tangs who did not like Alitet. She was curious to see what kind of men they were. The American food remained untouched and Alitet threw it to the dogs.

When Alitet retired to Atteneul's polog, Tygrena's curiosity reached fever pitch. She grew hot with excitement. Thrusting her head out of the polog she lay peer-

ing into the dark passage, enjoying the frosty air that cooled her burning face and bare shoulders. Finally making up her mind she slipped on her fur coat and ran off to Vaamcho's yarang.

Tygrena silently poked her head under the skin curtain.

"Come in, come in, Tygrena," cried old Vaal, pleased to see her.

"No, I must run back at once—I have just come to have a look," she said, examining the young Russian lad and the bearded chief.

She would have liked to hear them speaking, but they had fallen silent upon her entry.

"Never mind, I'll hear all about it tomorrow from Alek," thought Tygrena and disappeared.

"That was Alitet's wife. A very good woman," said Vaal.

"Alitet took her against her will. She ran away and he brought her back again," added Vaamcho.

"We must take her under our protection, Nikita Sergeyevich," said Zhukov.

"We shall, Andrei," answered Los.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

During their long tour of inspection up the coast the Revcom men had forgotten the feel of a real bed and the sensation of washing with water instead of snow. Their bodies cried out for water.

Los brought in snow in a bucket and thawed it on the stove. Then he dragged in a baby's bathtub which he had brought back from one of the outlying trading posts. Andrei had been curious about that bathtub during the journey and had asked:

"Why are you lugging that thing about with you. We haven't any babies, have we?"

"That's my secret," Los had answered with a grin.

Now, placing the bathtub next to the washstand, Los said:

"A bath, under our conditions, is a bit of a problem, but not at all impossible. Ingenuity, my dear man, ingenuity's the thing! You've been wondering why I've been dragging this bathtub five hundred kilometres? That tub, my dear fellow, is going to act as our sink and we're going to wash over the washstand. Pity there aren't any birch trees growing around here, otherwise I'd make a switch and have a real Russian steam bath."

The Revcom hut was well heated. Los undressed and, slapping his thighs, said:

"With a little stretch of the imagination we can now believe ourselves to be in a real bath. So here goes."

He poured some water into the bathtub, stepped into it and began washing his head under the washstand. He grunted with satisfaction like a walrus.

"Ugh! I feel a ton easier. . . . Come on, get undressed! I've heated some water for you too. A whole bucketful—enough to wash a bear in."

It was midnight, but the glimmer of the white night streamed relentlessly through the little window and drove away sleep. Refreshed by their bath the two men lay stretched luxuriously on their beds. How little a man needed to make him happy! Just one bucket of water!

"I forgot to mention, Nikita Sergeyeovich. After we'd spoken to Alitet about his contraband trade Tygrena followed me out to the door and said: 'Alitet is a bad man.'"

"Yes, I noticed that girl. She struck me as being a person of character. When Vaamcho comes down to the Revcom we'll have to put him wise. We'll call Tygrena out and have a chat with her. Well, Mr. Zhukoff, what do you say to a smoke of Capstan before we turn in!"

"Okay, Mr. Los. Governor general!"

They laughed, remembering the Americans, and lit up.

"We'll fetch teachers over and medical men," said Los, weaving dreams of the future. "We'll have our own people at the trading stations—that's when we'll get things going. The American trading stations are all right as far as they go, but all they know is business. We want the trading stations to perform a cultural mission, explain things to the people and not merely barter tobacco for furs. We'll have to get rid of 'em and set up our own trading stations."

"But the North Company's got an agreement for three years!"

Los propped himself up on his pillow and growled:

"And what about the school buildings and the hospitals—have they brought them over? Eh?"

"Yes, but we've got no say in this matter, Nikita Sergeyevich. The Narkomvneshtorg* does all the dealings with this company."

"What of it? What are you and I here—dummies? Of course I'm not going to send 'em packing tomorrow. . . . But I can raise the question, can't I? What's to prevent me sending in a report to the Gubernia Revcom and laying all the facts before them?"

"I suppose so."

"Ah, there you are! We'll 'mail' our report about this tomorrow first thing."

"And what are we going to do about the contraband traffic? Did you see the pledge Alitet got from Taki Black Beetle? It's these smugglers who are fleecing the people, and making away with the furs."

"We'll set up coast guard posts, get men over specially for them. That's another thing for tomorrow's 'mail.' Well, that'll do! Let's get some sleep!" And Los turned over on his side.

It grew quite light in the Revcom hut. The sun had no sooner set than it began climbing the sky again. Andrei could not fall asleep. He got up and went to the window. There was not a soul without.

Andrei shook Los out of his sleep.

"I was thinking it would be a good idea to organize a culture centre here. You know, various kinds of educational services. . . ."

Los raised himself on his elbow, and glaring at Andrei, snapped:

"Who the devil's interested in your nocturnal phantasies? Has the enemy shown up that you have to wake me? A fellow can't go to sleep peacefully after his bath! First it was the blessed light kept me awake, now it's you. Isn't tomorrow good enough? Hang something over the window and go to sleep!"

Los pulled the blanket angrily over his head.

"I thought you weren't sleeping too," said Andrei and hung a jacket over the window. But the light still penetrated. Andrei lay down and quickly fell asleep.

"Now I can't sleep," said Los looking at his sleeping companion. He picked up his tall fur boot and took a well-aimed blow with it at Andrei.

"Andrei! Andryusha! What was it you wanted to tell me so urgently?" he cried, and there was a hint of buried laughter in his voice.

Andrei rubbed his eyes sleepily, yawned, stared at Los sitting up in bed, then broke into a laugh. He swung himself out of bed, stretched his arms and yawned again.

"I wanted to tell you about the culture centre, Nikita Sergeyevich. One that would include a hospital, and a boarding school, and a vet service for treating and breeding good dogs, and a politico-educational service and a bathhouse. A real bathhouse like they have on the 'main-

land,' not like our washstand arrangement. And, of course, a bakery. The people here have never tasted bread and there's nowhere to bake it."

It was decided to submit this proposal, too, for the consideration of the Gubernia Revcom. The letter box received another bulky package into its capacious interior.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ever new parties of hunters and trappers kept arriving at the trading post daily. Mr. Simons was busy in his store from morning till night. The work tired him out and, on Mr. Thompson's advice, he sometimes suspended business.

"That's all right, they don't mind waiting even for two or three days. They enjoy living here and are in no hurry to get home," Mr. Thompson had said, thinking the while to himself: "These johnnies have gone clean crazy! Where the dickens have they got all those furs from? I thought Alitet had collected them all. A hundred and twenty white foxes in a single day! I never heard of such a thing!"

One morning Yarak said to Mr. Simons:

"I cannot help you do the trading today. I have a headache and feel giddy. Let Charlie be your interpreter. He speaks our language well."

Mr. Thompson gladly accepted Mr. Simons' proposal. But he soon regretted having come to the trading post. A roaring trade was being done. The trappers were in high spirits and they received so much merchandise that their sledges were loaded high with it.

"See, Charlie, how the new Merican trades with us! He is always in good spirits and we no longer take our pelts back with us. You never did such a trade with us," said a jovial young trapper.

"What does he say, Thompson?" asked Mr. Simons.

"He says he has a long way to go," muttered Mr. Thompson. "You're far too generous with him, Simons. You could pay him much less and he'd be just as delighted."

"I couldn't do that, Thompson—not with Los around. He has a copy of our price lists and if he finds out that we're not giving full value he'll be down on our firm like a ton of bricks. The thing's got to be handled with subtlety," said Mr. Simons with a grin.

Mr. Thompson went home feeling pretty blue. He entered the house quietly and was on the point of going into his room when he suddenly stopped and pricked up his ears. Then, with a swift movement, he tore down the fur curtain of the apartment in which his family lived. Mary was there alone with Yarak.

Charles Thompson saw red. Choking with rage he rushed at Yarak with clenched fists.

Yarak seized him by the wrists and held them in a grip of steel. In the same instant he caught the flash of a hunter's knife in Mary's hand.

"Drop that, Mary!" shouted Yarak "Go away!"

Mary hesitated.

"Quick, get out of here!" shouted Yarak angrily, and Mary disappeared.

"You scoundrel, you deceiver! What did you come here for!" spluttered Charlie.

Gripping Charlie's wrists Yarak looked him squarely in the eye and said coolly:

"The Russki chief said I could come.... Said I could marry. It is the Russki law...."

"God damn you!" roared Charles Thompson and suddenly bit Yarak's hand.

Yarak flung him aside, sending him sprawling against the wall. He ran out into the passage, seized Mary by the hand and made off with her down the street.

Charles Thompson lay for a long time on the skins, then mopped his face with a coloured handkerchief and went out. Running into Rultyna he shrieked:

"You hellhag, you! Where are the children? What have you done with them, you damn bawd! These filthy goings on are of your doing! You wait, see what I'll do tomorrow!"

Rultyna said nothing.

Mr. Thompson strode into his room and slammed the door.

"Charlie is cross. Charlie is very cross!" thought Rultyna and went to call the children to put them to bed.

There was no trace of Mary in the settlement. Neither was there of Yarak.

Rultyna wandered all over the settlement in search of her daughter. She looked into every yarang.

"They went down that trail," said a boy whom she accosted. "They must have passed that hill by now."

"Good. Let them go," she said.

Rultyna returned home and peeped into Charlie's room. He was lying on his bed, fully dressed. Rultyna went in and called him. Charlie was asleep.

Rultyna snatched the dog harness from off the wall and ran outside. In a twinkling she had twelve dogs harnessed to the sledge and drove off in the direction of the hill. She shouted at the dogs and hit the sledge with the gee pole, urging the team on faster and faster.

Soon Rultyna caught sight of the fugitives.

But Yarak and Mary suddenly swerved from the trail and ran swiftly towards the stony slope.

The old woman stood up in the sledge and balancing herself with difficulty cried out at the top of her voice:

"Yara-a-ak! It's Ru-u-ultyna!"

Her feeble voice was lost amid the vast tundra. Yarak and Mary ran so fast that the dogs could barely overtake them. Rultyna turned the team off the trail and headed

it for their tracks. She stood in the sledge all the time shouting and calling Yarak and Mary.

Yarak knew that the sledge would have difficulty in riding over the hillside which was strewn with fragments of rocks and stones. They would yet have time to escape!

Gasping for breath they crawled into a cave.

"If Charlie gets off the sledge to search for us you go after him and kill him with a stone," said Mary.

The dog-team dashed up to the foot of the hill and came to a dead stop as the sledge was caught amid the stones.

"Mary! It's I, Rultyna! Fear not!" the runaways suddenly heard.

"Mary! Come out!" cried Yarak joyfully.

The old woman sat hunched in the sledge, too weak and spent to utter a word. Mary flung her arms around her.

Rultyna, overcome with emotion, said:

"Take this dog-team. Go away at once into the tundra, go to the hills and live with my brother Haimelkot."

"Rultyna, come with us," said Yarak, deeply moved.

"No, I cannot. I have many children waiting for me at home. I shall return home and be as silent as these stones."

"Rultyna, we shall call on the bearded Russian chief. Andrei told me that the bearded one wants to give us a marriage paper," said Yarak.

"Good. Go to the bearded one. Maybe the Russian will understand that Mary needs a husband," and she heaved a sigh.

Yarak took the gee pole out of Rultyna's hands and called sharply to the dogs, whom he had bred and nurtured. The latter, recognizing their master's voice, lowered their tails and set off at a merry pace.

"Tagam! Tagam!" Rultyna cried out after them. She stood for a long time gazing at the retreating sledge.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Mr. Thompson awoke at an unusually early hour. This was the first time in his life that he had slept in his clothes.

Blinking at the glaring sunshine that streamed into his room through the uncurtained window Mr. Thompson drew a deep sigh, shook his head and frowned. His glance wandered to the alarm clock, but that patented timepiece had stopped. "What's happening in this house?" thought Charles Thompson.

He took a turn in the room, and glancing through the window noticed that his sledge was missing from the place in which it usually stood. A sudden foreboding seized him. Throwing a fur jacket over his shoulders he hurried out and ran round the house, but there was not a sign of either sledge or dogs anywhere. Thompson rushed into the passage breathless and agitated, and stopping before his family's apartment demanded grimly:

"Where is Mary?"

There was no reply.

He flung open the door of his room and saw Rultyna there clearing the table.

"Where are the dogs?" he shouted.

Rultyna hung her head in silence, waiting meekly for her white husband to say: "Get out!"

Charles Thompson pushed her roughly and she dropped the crockery on the floor, smashing a cup.

Breathing heavily Thompson came running to Rynteu's yarang.

"Get me some dogs, quick!"

Rynteu, clad only in his fur stockings with a parka thrown over his shoulders, stood debating with himself: "I must not give him the dogs, and yet I must." He said imperturbably:

"The dogs are running about the settlement, Charlie."

"Get the dogs quick, you fool-man!"

"But, Charlie, what dogs in the settlement can be found to overtake yours? Yours are good dogs, e-e-eh, very good dogs! Only Alitet's can compare with them. You had better wait—maybe Alitet will turn up."

"What drivel are you jabbering, you old devil! I must go at once, this very minute! Get the dogs harnessed, look sharp!"

Charles Thompson shook him by the dangling sleeve of his parka and Rynteu went unhurriedly into his yarang. He reappeared carrying a bundle of dogs' harness which he held up to Charlie's nose, saying:

"Only the harness is trashy! It needs mending."

"Let's have what you've got!" snarled Mr. Thompson.

Rynteu went off whistling in search of his none too spirited dogs. He sauntered back in due course with the pack at his heels. They came eagerly enough, labouring under the delusion that they were going to be fed.

Rynteu, with maddening leisureliness, set about harnessing them, muttering the while:

"What sense is there in trying to overtake them on these marmots? It is like a lame old man attempting to catch a wild reindeer!"

Rynteu contrived to harness in the lead a dog who had a bad foot and did not understand the commands.

Charles Thompson took his seat in the sledge and drove off. He counted on overtaking the runaways at the next settlement. He failed, however, to make allowance for his dogs. He shouted at them and threw his gee pole at them, but they merely whined plaintively and kept looking back at him without quickening their pace. Finally they stopped and would budge no further.

Charles Thompson sat in the sledge, despair written all over his face.

"It's useless," he thought, and turned the dogs back. They immediately set off at a brisk canter with tails erect and ears pricked up.

Mr. Thompson, exhausted by impotent rage, went to the trading post.

Mr. Simons met him with a cheery "Good morning, Thompson!"

"May be a good morning, but not for me," said Mr. Thompson morosely. "What the devil's come over these heathens, Simons—perhaps you can tell me? It's unbelievable! Take that fellow Rynleu, who's been dependent on me these last twenty years and was as devoted as a dog—even he has started acting funny. It was all I could do to make him give me a dog-team. And when the dirty beggar did round the mongrels up, you should have seen what a collection of wrecks they were! Mind you, Simons, a year ago my single word, just one word, was enough to have the finest team in the settlement got ready in a trice. I can't make head or tail of what's going on," concluded Mr. Thompson with a helpless gesture.

"What's the matter, Thompson?"

Upon hearing the story of Mary's elopement with Yarak Mr. Simons sighed in sympathy and shook his head regretfully.

"There's nothing for it, Thompson. Take my advice and shake the dust of this darned country off your feet. You don't want to have your corpse thrown out on the rocks as carrion for the wild beasts, the way you told me the custom is here, do you? D'you mean to say with the money you've got you wouldn't like to spend the rest of your days in a civilized country? You haven't had the taste of fresh milk in your mouth for twenty years. It's too awful for words, Thompson! That girl of yours, too, is as much a savage as the rest of 'em. Don't take offence, Thompson—I'm being frank with you. Really, I'm very sorry for you!"

"Oh, that's all right. You're a good guy, Simons. I haven't had anyone speak to me in such a friendly way before. . . . I say, Simons, what about my going with you to Canada? I'm all alone now."

"I'd simply be delighted, Thompson! We'd make a go of it together, I'm sure!"

A long silence ensued in which the two men sat absorbed in thoughts of their future life together in Canada.

"Coming back to our conversation, Thompson--you're worried about your daughter, aren't you? My dear fellow, that girl was born here. She'd hate America and Canada as heartily as I hate this Godforsaken land of ice. She'd pine for these here wild rocks, their filthy yarangs, their walrus meat and these howling blizzards. Yarak's just the kind of husband she needs. I'm sure she'll be happy with him in a way. . . ."

"I'll take Ben with me. . . . And I'll see if I can't get Mary back. I believe she'd get used to it in Canada in time--what do you think, Simons?"

"Possibly, possibly," said Mr. Simons half-heartedly.

"But what shall I do with the furs? I've got over fifteen hundred pelts. They won't let me take them out with me. And I can't say I'm keen on going all the way to Petropavlovsk to sell them. Los wanted to take them over on the spot, but luckily he didn't have the money."

"May I give you a piece of friendly advice, Thompson?"

"What's that, Simons?" queried Mr. Thompson, all ears.

"As a matter of fact it isn't so much advice as a simple lesson in geography. Now Nome on Alaska is no farther off than the nearest Chukchi settlement. That's one thing. Secondly, the Bering Strait is not so terribly wide, Thompson!" Mr. Simons smiled significantly. "If I had to I could cross it in a row-boat. You only need to give

the boat hunters a packet of Kentucky to be in America within a few hours with all your belongings. You can wait for me in Alaska or at 'Frisco and we can embark together from there for Canada."

"And what about the house? I wanted to sell the house and the store."

"My dear Thompson! Who on earth would want to buy that old packing case of a house? Besides, if you start looking for a buyer you'll rouse suspicion. Mr. Los will smell a rat at once. If I were you I'd ask Mr. Los to allow me to stay on here and spend my last years in the bosom of my family. And when the coast's clear you can load your stuff on a boat and beat it!"

"You're quite right, Simons. You have real American business brains."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The long northern winter was over. The snowdrifts had become loose and soggy. They seemed to be sinking into the earth, dwindling from day to day. The bounds between night and day had almost vanished, and the long, sunny days slipped swiftly by.

An argument unexpectedly sprang up between the two Revcom men. They had lost a day. How it had happened neither of them could say. According to Los it was April 20, according to Zhukov April 21.

Each warmly stood up for his particular date, citing in support a mass of documentary evidence. They went back over the train of events, recalling the various stages of their recent long journey, but all to no purpose—the dates would not tally. And there was not a single Soviet citizen in the region who could settle the point for them.

"All the same you're wrong, Nikita Sergeyevich! You'll see, you'll be celebrating the First of May a day earlier."

"All right, then. We'll celebrate my date first and then yours and make a double holiday of it."

Zhukov's pupils came into the Revcom. They took off their outer fur garments, remaining in the gingham shirts which Los himself had cut out for them. They sat down to their lesson, carefully writing out the letters of the Russian alphabet and pronouncing words and phrases. Their greatest difficulty was the letter D which they pronounced as T, saying Tog instead of Dog and Tuck instead of Duck.

The children were eager pupils and the long lesson did not bore them. When it was over Los emerged from behind the curtain with a box of dominoes.

"Well, kids, what about a game?"

"Yes, yes, a game, Los!" they sang in chorus.

The children, like the grownups, did not call the Revcom commissioner by his name and patronymic as was the custom in Russia. It was too long and unintelligible. They had no surnames and patronymics themselves.

Los, with a flourish, was about to lay down his last piece, when a little tot slipped his own domino into the place and shouted gleefully:

"Wait, Los! I have finished!"

"Los has lost the game, Los has lost the game!" cried the children, clapping their hands, while Los frowned, looking as though he were genuinely annoyed.

Knowing that Los could not be induced to play more than one game the children slipped quickly into their little parkas and scampered away.

One of them, pausing in the doorway, threw back:

"Los, old man Umkatagen is going to die tonight." The boy drew a finger across his throat.

"Here, wait a minute! What's that you said?"

"Tonight old Umkatagen is going to be strangled. Everything is ready for it," the boy explained calmly.

Los pulled the boy down to a seat by the table and asked very quietly, almost in a whisper:

"To be strangled, you say? What for?..."

The boy threw an anxious glance around him, obviously weighing in his mind whether he ought to talk about such things or not.

"He is a very sick old man. . . . His leg is spoilt. The shamans tried to cure him, but it was no good. Ermen, Umkatagen's son, has lost all his dogs—some he sacrificed to the spirits, some he gave to the shamans. He used up all his dogs but the illness can't be driven out. A very wicked spirit must be living in his leg. And so Umkatagen is going to the people of the Upper World. He is going tonight. All the folks are glad. Ermen too is very glad."

"You run off to Ermen right away and tell him: 'Los forbids the old man to be strangled!'" Do you understand? You mustn't strangle people! Run along, I'll soon be there myself!" said Los in great agitation, hastily putting on his torbazes.

The boy ran off.

"Wait a minute, Nikita Sergeyevich, there's plenty of time till tonight. Let's better talk the thing over," said Zhukov.

"There's nothing to talk over! I won't have the man strangled!" cried Los.

"You can't prevent these things by administrative measures, Nikita Sergeyevich. It's useless. They'll all agree with you, but as soon as your back is turned they'll strangle him. Don't forget that the old man has given his 'word.' To retract it, according to their customs, is unworthy of a man."

"What do you suggest then—letting the old man be strangled? Make yourself clear!" snapped Los, pulling on his skin boots.

"You're excited, Nikita Sergeyevich, and don't want

to understand me. I don't think we can break down such walls in a single year! I'm damned if I know what to suggest. . . ."

"But I do! What the deuce have we come here for? Who are we—representatives of the Soviet Government, or what?" exploded Los, struggling with his boots. "Aren't we followers of Lenin?"

"Yes, but Lenin also wrote that custom and superstitious survivals are the hardest thing to deal with! The war against them must be a laborious, systematic campaign based on a great power of conviction. . . ."

"That's enough! I don't need any lectures!" shouted Los with a downward hacking motion of the hand and began nervously pacing the room in silence.

Ermen came running into the Revcom.

"Los," he began excitedly, "the old man must be strangled. The old man himself has asked to be strangled. I cannot refuse his last request. There will be great misfortune. . . ."

"There won't be any misfortune. Live people are not strangled. Your father Umkatagen is not your enemy," said Los.

"No, and I would not think of strangling an enemy. I love Umkatagen and want to do him good—to carry out his last wish. No man of our people has ever taken his 'word' back. And you, Los, want to make my father a bad man, the worst of men."

"There's a problem for you, dammit!" muttered Los under his breath.

At this point Andrei interposed:

"You know, Ermen, that we have a new law, and it forbids a man to be strangled. If not this law we would not say anything."

"The old man must be strangled. It will be very bad if the old man is not strangled," persisted Ermen doggedly.

Los stood by the window, meditatively chewing his beard. Suddenly he spun round, went up to Ermen and said severely:

"I forbid you to strangle Umkatagen! If I hear that the old man has been strangled you will be punished. I will send you away from the Chukotsk land as soon as a ship comes. And when you die in a strange land none of your people will hear your voice before you die..."

Los' voice was agitated and sharp.

Ermen heard the Russian chief out in attentive silence, then said:

"Los, you are the first Tang whom our people call a real man. It is only the first winter since you have come to our land, and trade is entirely different already. Our people now drink their tea with sugar. Men have rifles who never had them before, men have traps who went without them. Everywhere the people say: 'The Bearded One loves our foxes and has made them worth many goods.' The people say that you are like a good shaman, a kind shaman, you help us to live. That is what people say along the coast. But now you talk of things which my ears cannot understand. Have the bad shamans spoiled you? You are not the same! Why do you say that Umkatagen's last wish must not be granted? Umkatagen is a good old man."

Ermen too was agitated, but he spoke quietly, almost in a whisper. Beads of sweat stood out on his face.

"Ermen, let us sit down on the bench, closer to each other," said Los in a calmer, controlled voice.

Ermen sat down, looking somewhat startled.

"Now, listen to what I am going to tell you. Listen well Umkatagen is not such a very old man. I know him. Last autumn he was still steering a boat during the whale hunting. A ship will come and the Russian doctor will cure Umkatagen's leg. I am telling you the truth. I shall order the trading men to bring engines for the boats



which will drive them without oars. They will sail as fast as a schooner. And I want Umkatagen's eyes to see this new life. I tell you the truth! You said yourself that life has changed a little already. Do you understand what I say?"

"Yes, I understand," said Ermen.

"There is a wise man on the Mainland—his name is Lenin," put in Andrei. "It is he who has pointed the way to the new life. The old law, the law of Charlie Red Nose and Alitet has been thrown out and destroyed. A new law has been made which helps people to live.

"And that new law forbids you to kill old people," went on Los. "They should be cared for and properly looked after and their lives made easier. Go home, Ermen, and tell the old man that Los does not want old Umkatagen to die. Tell him that I wish to have a talk with him. . . ."

Ermen heaved a deep sigh and said:

"I don't know."

He picked up his cap and went home.

Los paced the room, throwing an occasional glance out of the window.

"Well, Andrei, d'you think we've convinced him?"

"No. You believe the liquidation of old survivals is an easy process? You imagine that you can transfer them plump into socialist society? No, Nikita Sergeyevich, we'll have to put in a good deal of work yet. And jolly hard work! It's going to be a difficult job that will need delicate handling."

"You're too young to be teaching me yet!" cried Los. "I prefer to take the bull by the horns!"

"They'll strangle him," he heard Zhukov's voice behind him.

"Then get dressed and let's go to the yarang at once!" said Los with sudden determination. "And I shan't leave the place until I've had my way."

A lad stood by the entrance, barring the way. He said in a whisper:

"You cannot go in. Tomorrow you may come."

Los thrust him aside, and bending low he dived into the polog.

"Stop!" he cried, seeing that Ermen had placed the noose over his father's head. "What are you doing?"

He tore the thong out of Ermen's hand and crawling on his hands and knees over the skins he removed the noose from the condemned man's neck.

"Tell them, Andrei—you speak better than I do—that the evil spirit will not blame the old man or Ermen or the others. Let it wreak its vengeance on me, for it was I who prevented the old man from being strangled."

Andrei translated, and the people stared at one another in blank consternation. There was a look of sheer terror in their eyes. Even the shaman cowered terrified in a corner whence he glared at the Russians with a look of hate. No one dared open his mouth. Suddenly the old man raised himself on the skins on which he had been lying prostrate and said in a muffled voice:

"Why have you come here? Or has anyone called you? Go hence from here, you man who has lost his mind."

Los smiled good-naturedly and drew his pipe and tobacco out of his pocket.

"Let's have a smoke, old man!" he said, proffering his pouch.

The old man turned his back on Los in silence.

"Come, Umkatagen, let us smoke! I give you a present of my pipe." And Los placed the pipe in the old man's hand.

A painful smile crept into the old man's face.

"The Russian chief is like a child," he said, holding the pipe out to be filled.

Los filled it for him, rolled himself a cigarette and held out a lighted match. They puffed away in silence.

"What now?" asked Umkatagen of the shaman. The emotional strain and his terror of the evil spirit proved too much for the old man and he began to weep softly. He smoked, while the tears rolled slowly down his grief-stricken face.

The whole thing was so unprecedented that the shaman himself was utterly bewildered. Finding his voice at last he hissed from out his corner:

"The old man's name must be changed at once, so that Kele will not know him. We must cover up the tracks."

"What name shall I take?" said Umkatagen, thinking furiously.

"Take a Russian name, old man," said Andrei. "Then Kele will lose track of you altogether."

"Yes, yes, that is right! Kele will not seek a Russian," chimed in the shaman.

"What is the name of that Russian who has invented the new law of life?" asked Ermen, turning to Los.

"Lenin! Ilyich!"

"Let the old man take himself that name," said Ermen.

The choice of a new name brooked no delay. The old man was forthwith christened Ilyich.

"Well, have you taken a name?" demanded the shaman.

"I have, I have!" answered the old man quickly.

The name was there and then put to the test.

"Umkatagen!" cried Ermen.

"Umkatagen!" shouted the shaman.

The old man was silent.

"Ilyich!" called Ermen.

"Voil!" responded ex-Umkatagen with alacrity.

"Umkatagen! Ilyich! Umkatagen! Ilyich!" came calls from all sides.

And every time the name of Umkatagen was uttered a deep silence reigned in the yarang, and as soon as any-

one uttered the name Ilyich the old man started and responded quickly.

"Well, Ilyich, now let's have another smoke," cried Los gaily.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Los woke up early. Andrei was not in the room.

"Gone off hunting again. Ah well, let him enjoy himself," thought Los with a touch of paternal affection.

Friendship is hard to preserve between men who are thrown together for a long time in each other's company, sharing a crowded little room, knowing each other's good and bad points and having heard each other's life story related times beyond number. But Los and Andrei were true friends.

Los lit the stove, heated a tin of meat for breakfast, drank his tea and sat down to work. Sitting at his writing desk he suddenly felt a twinge of pain in his legs. Upon examining them he found them to be slightly swollen.

"I wonder whether scurvy is not living in my legs?" he thought in Chukchi.

Going up to the mirror he closely examined his gums. They too were slightly swollen.

"Nonsense!" said Los and resumed his labours.

He had seldom taken the air of late, being busy the last few days in writing up his report to the Gubernia Revcom. The report was a voluminous one.

"Who the devil would have thought I'd become a writer!" he mused, eyeing the pile of written sheets with a twinkle of amusement.

Evening came, but Zhukov had not yet returned from the hunting.

"I hope the ice doesn't break away and send him drifting the ocean on an ice floe." The thought worried Los and he went outside to have a look at the sea.

The sea was a dead calm. The ice fields stretched away as far as the eye could reach. The sea was safe enough. Catching sight of old Komo, Los walked over to him.

Komo was sitting on the skeleton of a whale, smoking a long brass pipe. He was a very ancient man. He had never known what it was to be ill in all his long life, and only senility now kept him chained to his yarang.

"Well, how is life, Komo?" asked Los.

"Very good. All our hunters are out there," said Komo, pointing his pipe seawards. "The hunting is good now. There are many seals, sometimes sea lions. Your youth is also there."

"Is it not dangerous to go so far out among the ice?"

"No, it is not dangerous now." The old man squinted at the clear sky and added: "There will be no wind for five days."

"That's good, Komo. Now I'll go back to work," said Los greatly relieved.

"What kind of work can a man do in a hut?" thought Komo. Aloud he said:

"Go then, go!"

Los made out the program for the May First celebrations.

"I'll write my speech out, learn it by heart and shoot it off in Chukchi," he decided.

He sat for a long time writing the notes for his speech, but he made little progress.

"Now the May Day secret meetings of the workers under tsarism—what do they know of them?" he mused. "And the fight against the autocracy? The only kind of fight they know is wrestling, man to man. How explain it to them? A pretty problem!"

He sat on writing till late in the night. One after another his speeches found their way into the stove, and as he watched them burning and turning into ashes, Los thought: "You can make a speech that way too. Spin a

long yarn and see all your efforts turned to ashes." And tugging at his beard he bent anew over the table.

Before going to sleep he went out and had another look at the ice fields. The sea was calm.

In the night Los was awakened by a loud knocking at the door. Hastily slipping into his clothes he opened the door slightly and peered out. He saw a tall man and a woman. The latter's cast of features was not Chukchi.

"Russki chief, help us now. Help us quick, quick!" said the man excitedly.

"Where do you come from?"

"We are Yarak and Mary."

"O-oh, Yarak!" cried Los drawing him into the room. "Come in, sit down! We'll make some tea. Do you know how to use a primus stove, Yarak?"

"Yes, I do," answered Yarak proudly.

Yarak and Los got busy with the tea. Mary sat watching Los in silence. The powerful hands of the Russian bearded chief fascinated her.

They had just sat down to have their tea when Andrei burst into the room.

"Hello, what's this, a wedding? How are you, Yarak! How do you do, Mary! I killed four seals!" he cried all in one breath.

"Kakomei!" cried Yarak in amazement, and then began relating what had befallen them.

"I want to marry Mary very much, and Mary wants to marry me," he wound up.

Los brought out a fat book.

"So you've decided to marry? Fine! that's fine! I'll register you right away. How old are you, Yarak?"

"I don't know. We don't count our age. I was a little boy when Charlie took me in. Mary was three, years younger."

"And how old is Mary?"

Mary, hiding her face behind Yarak, answered:
"Charlie says I will be twenty-one this summer."

"That means Yarak is twenty-four. We'll take it at that. He looks it."

Los brought out a large sheet of paper and wrote on it in a big sprawling hand:

CERTIFICATE

It is hereby certified that citizen Yarak and citizeness Mary Thompson have been registered as married at the office of the Local Commissioner of the Kamchatka Revolutionary Committee for the Chukotsk County.

Commissioner *Los*
Secretary *Zhukov*

Los read the paper out, the newlyweds hanging on his lips.

At the mention of Thompson's name Yarak squirmed. When the reading was over he said:

"Charlie should be crossed out in that paper. Who wants him there?"

Yarak watched Los take a red little stone out of a drawer and light it with a match. Blood began to drip thickly from the stone as from a wounded walrus. Los sprinkled some drops of this blood onto the certificate, breathed on a little round iron fixed to a handle and banged it down on the stain, pressing the paper hard against the table.

Yarak and Mary watched these proceedings with keen interest and did not miss a single movement of this big bearded man who had brought such a good law to their country.

The sealing over Los handed the certificate solemnly to Yarak.

"I congratulate you," he said, and shook their hands. "You are splendid, Yarak. You're a revolutionary! Translate that to him, Andrei!"

"I'd like to see you translating the word 'revolutionary.' It's not so simple," answered Zhukov.

"Don't you worry, Andrei, we'll get it translated. They'll learn that word! They'll learn it!"

Yarak took the marriage paper, carefully folded it and secreted it in his bosom.

"Where are you going now, Yarak?" asked Los.

"To the hills, to the reindeer man. Rultyna told us to go to her brother Haimelkot. Afterwards we shall go back to the coast, when Charlie dies," said Yarak gaily, winking at his wife.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The news of Yarak's and Mary's flight sped like wild-fire along the coast. Their names were in everybody's mouth.

The rumour reached the Enmakai settlement too. It stirred a strange exultant thrill in Tygreña's breast. But ~~there was no one~~ with whom she could discuss the news. Narginaut since her sister ~~had~~ come was no longer friendly with her, and she felt very lonely. Her only joy was the thought of the coming baby. "There he is, there he is!" she would say to herself, feeling her big belly. She was to become a real woman after all!

Allitet being away she decided to pay a visit to old Vaal's yarang. Meeting Alek, Tygreña cried joyfully:

"I can hear him living here in my belly!"

Old Vaal and Alek, and especially Vaamcho, were glad for Tygreña's sake.

"Alek, people say that the bearded chief told Mary: 'A person cannot live without marriage....' He made



them a marriage paper with fire and blood. And he is a stranger, mind you—a white man. . . .”

The old man removed his pipe from his mouth and said:

“Yes, he understands. He has the eyes of a reindeer. Vaal is quick at sizing up good men. I know a beast’s mind by its ways and a man by his eyes. We have had many Tangs here but none of them could understand the desire of our heart. The Bearded One understands!”

The old man paused, puffed at his pipe and resumed:

“But he made a mistake. He made one mistake. He should not have stopped in our yarang. I knew beforehand that Alitet would take his traps back. Where can we get traps now? A man without traps is like a sledge without dogs.”

“Vaal, the new Merican is giving traps on loan. The Bearded One told him to.”

“Who has brought that news?” exclaimed Vaamcho.

“I do not know,” said Tygrena. “But I know that he is already giving traps. Alitet is sure of it, that is why he was angry and swore. Now he has rushed off to see Charlie—to complain, I suppose.”

“Let him complain. Charlie Red Nose is now a weak man. He has been tied on a chain, like a little dog,” observed Vaamcho.

“I believe Alitet will want to go to Haimelkot, to take the dogs from Yarak. It was he who gave Charlie Red Nose the team as a gift. Maybe he will take Mary too?”

“Yarak has a marriage paper,” said Vaamcho.

“It is said that the brand on it broke during the night—they slept with it under their heads. Only a small red piece is left. Yarak has shut the paper up in a wooden box and carries it in his bosom. But it must be spoilt now that the brand is broken. What is a marriage paper for?” asked Tygrena.

Old Vaal uttered thoughtfully:

"Why is there a herdsman in the herd? To protect the reindeer from the wolves. Maybe the marriage paper, like the herdsman, protects the young couple? Who can know all the mysteries of the new law?"

"It is hard to understand, but it is very interesting," said Tygrena.

"Tygrena, where is Aye now?" asked Vaamcho.

"I have heard said that he has wandered with the herds far beyond the mountains. In the summer, people say, he will bring his herds to the coast. I suppose he has married."

"And you, Vaamcho, must go without fail to the new Merican and find out all about the trap news. We may be left without any traps," said the old man. He struck a match, lit his pipe and continued: "Much news is afoot on the coast of late. I fear something may happen. I had a dream that a hare devoured a wolf. A weak little hare devoured a wolf."

At Loren surprising things were happening.

Mr. Thompson conceived a hatred for everybody, especially for Rultyna. He allowed no one into his room, and prepared his meals himself. He went outdoors when everybody else had gone to sleep. He even stopped going to see Mr. Simons.

"Simons wants me to leave Mary behind," thought Mr. Thompson. "He wants Charles Thompson to take only his bank accounts with him to Canada without the heirs. Oh, I know what he's after, the fox!"

And soon, for no apparent reason, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Simons stopped meeting.

The hunters no longer brought the news to Charlie Red Nose. He even had no idea of the whereabouts of Mary and Yarak. The sight, through his window, of Mr. Simons airing his pelts drove Mr. Thompson to distraction. With hands clasped behind his back he paced his

room like a caged tiger. All the carefully nurtured habits of a lifetime had gone to the winds—he did not even cross out the dates on his calendar and stopped reading the newspapers and magazines. He look to going to bed at unscheduled hours and lay long with staring eyes, thinking:

"I wish it was summer already.... I wish the ice disappears—I won't stay here a single moment. The children? They have Norwegian blood in their veins. Mixed with that savage blood.... No, no! Ben is a real European. He's my real son. Mary too.... But Bertha? Merely the name, nothing more. Ben's illiterate! Not to be able to read or write at the age of twelve! Would such a thing be possible in a civilized country—with a rich father too? Here he runs about the yarangs with the filthy natives eating that horrible meat of theirs and relishing it too. Where have I been all this time?"

Mr. Thompson sprang out of bed and began nervously pacing the room again.

He saw Alitet through the window standing by his sledge, surrounded by a group of urchins. Mr. Thompson ran out.

"I have been waiting for you so long!" he cried eagerly.

"I have been riding about the tundra collecting debts."

They went inside.

"Bad times have come, Alitet!" said Charlie, seating himself in the rocking chair.

"Oi, very bad, Charlie! My ears refuse to hear about the Russian chief. My eyes refuse to look at him. On my way to you I tried to avoid him. But I had to deliver him some fox pelts—a fine or something," said Alitet, pulling out the receipt.

"What? A hundred pelts!" cried Mr. Thompson, letting loose a string of oaths. "But that's sheer robbery! A thief steals when the master is not at home, but he has

taken the pelts out of your own hands! He took forty-three pelts from me as well!"

"My heart wanted to jump out of my body when the Russian chief bundled my furs into his bag. Why has such a chief come to the coast? It was good without him—we were beginning to do big trading!"

"What other news have you heard?" Mr. Thompson asked peevishly.

"He said I must not trade with the schooners. If I do he will take everything away from me—my dogs as well."

"How many pelts have you collected this time?"

"Oi, very many! They are all hidden away. I shall wait for Brown again. He did good trading with me. We made some trade on paper too." And Alitet brought forth the Black Beetle document.

Mr. Thompson wiped his glasses and read it.

"What is it? Is it a bad paper?" asked Alitet in alarm as he watched Charlie's expression.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit, let me read it again. I can't see properly," answered Charlie, casting about in his mind what to say.

"That's all right, Alitet. This paper is the same as goods. I trade like that too. I forgot to tell you that Captain Brown will not be coming this summer. His schooner has broken down. It will take a long time to mend."

"Ai-ai-ai!" said Alitet, shaking his head. "Brown himself was afraid for his schooner—it was too light in a storm. I stowed all my walrus tusks and whalebone in it according to the paper, but just the same they were probably not enough. Who shall I sell my furs to this time? I have very many. I shall not sell them to the new Merican. He is at one with the bearded Russian."

"We'll have to take our furs to America ourselves this summer. We could do it easily on your whaleboat."

"Yes, my whaleboat is a good, strong boat."

"You will take me to the American coast—I too have a stock of fifteen hundred pelts. In the winter, when the prices in America are high, I shall sell your furs and mine and then come back to you together with Captain Brown. He is my trading friend. We shall not bring the schooner to Enmakai, but a little way past the gorge, so that no eye should see. Do you understand?"

"That's right," whispered Alitet. "We must not let Vaamcho see. He has turned bad altogether and made friends with the Russians."

"And I'll give you a paper for your furs, Alitet, like the one Brown gave you."

"Good, Charlie! Very good!"

"Beware of Ryn-teu, Alitet. They have made him a chief here. Ha-ha! A chief! He would never have had a yarang of his own if not for me. The Russian chief spoils people. I am afraid, Alitet, that the Russian chief may not let us take the furs out."

"We must kill him!" hissed Alitet. "And set fire to the new Merican's store. Then you and I will be able to trade once more. He must be killed. It was he who helped to take your girl away. They are now living in Haimel-kot's camp."

"With Rultyna's brother?"

"Yes, yes!"

Mr. Thompson lit his pipe and paced the room.

"Charlie, if we could lure the Russian into the hills I would kill him there," whispered Alitet with a cautious glance at the door.

"If you want I can fix it up so that you meet him in the hills."

"Ai, I want, I want very much! But how will you do it?"

"Wait, I'll soon be back."

Mr. Thompson scattered some rubbish outside his door and called Rultyna.

"Well, you bawd, do you think because you've packed Mary off to Haimelkot I've got to clear the rubbish from my door myself? Sweep it up at once?" he shouted.

Deliberately leaving the door ajar he went back into the room.

Rultyna came to the door with a brush and shovel and heard Charlie saying in a loud voice:

"Alitet, go at once to Haimelkot and bring back Mary and my dogs."

He went up to the door, shut it to, and leaning over to Alitet added in a whisper:

"She has heard and will quickly spread the news. The Russian chief will surely get to hear of it. Maybe now you will meet him in the hills."

"Ai, Charlie, what a big head you have! A Merican head!" cried Alitet with a gleam in his eyes.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

It was a perfectly still morning. Not a cry, not a squeak or rustle disturbed the silence of the tundra. The air streamed over the valleys and mountain gorges. At times its currents seemed almost tangible and flowed as smoothly as the waters of great rivers in calm weather. And over the far-flung tundra hung a vast and deep-blue sky without a single cloudlet.

A spry and nimble white fox darted out of its lair. It was no longer as snowy white as in midwinter. Its colour had faded in the spring sun and its coat was now tinged with yellow. The fox, a female, peered swiftly and anxiously around, then disappeared again underground.

Soon eight cubs came tumbling out of the lair. They were silly little things in their babyhood and stood huddled

dled together before the entrance. The mother scattered them apart with her muzzle and trotted off in search of breakfast. The baby foxes gazed about them fearfully but with great curiosity. This was their first sight of the world. They basked in the warming rays of the sun and began to frisk about. Suddenly the dark shadow of a large-eyed Polar owl hovered over them with a heavy flapping of wings. The young foxes disappeared in a flash into their subterranean dwelling.

There they sat cowering, waiting impatiently for their mother's return. She would usually bring them a live mouse, a ptarmigan or a piece of reindeer meat left over from a wolf's dinner, or the flesh of the seal laid out by the trappers.

Mother fox came running back driving a mouse towards her children. With little black snouts twitching excitedly and paws lifted in the air they pounced upon the prey and dug their sharp little claws into it. Thus the young foxes learned the wisdom of life. When they gained strength and experience they would venture into the great tundra, leaving a chain of little tracks in the snow.

Old Vaal, too, emerged from his yarang as from some dark burrow and squinted at the sun rising over the sea. He tightened his girdle and made his way slowly into the tundra, to search for the lairs of the white fox. One had to discover this in good time, in order to know where to lay the bait to get the foxes used to the places where the traps would be set.

The old man hobbled on, and his blue shadow swayed in front of him. He was thinking: "A rifle now costs two white fox pelts, and one can buy enough tea for one pelt to last a whole year. How then can a trapper not take care that his hunting should be good?"

Old Vaal climbed a small hill and raised his arm, throwing an elongated dancing shadow far out into the

tundra across the gleaming snow to the very edge of the earth.

He moved his arm from side to side, admiring the monstrous shadow. It formed an angle which no dog-team could gallop round in a single day.

Vaal walked about the tundra for a long time, making mental notes of likely fox haunts. By evening he felt very tired and coming across a boulder warmed by the sun he sat down on it and dozed off.

The old man had been away since the morning. He did not return home that day. It was only on the third day that he was found dead with an ear torn off. The old man's teeth stood revealed through a lacerated cheek. The claws of the grizzly bear had left their terrible mark on the old man's face. Vaal lay huddled beneath the carcass of the bear. One arm was thrust almost to the elbow in the beast's jaws, the other clasped the shaggy neck in a convulsive grip. The bear had evidently attacked the old man while he was asleep. But Vaal had conquered the lord of the tundra at the cost of his own life.

It was not often that men died as old Vaal had died. The sorrowful news was the talk of all the yarangs. A man rich in the lore of the sea, a wise counselor had died in mortal combat with the grizzly bear, like a real hunter.

Vaamcho mourned his loss deeply. After the funeral he shut himself up in his yarang. Custom ordained that he should not hunt for thirty days. Alek having gone to the stream for fresh-water ice Vaamcho sat alone in the polog with his sad thoughts, smoking a pipe. It is not good when the yarang is too roomy. It is miserable. It would be good if children came quickly. A yarang must be noisy.

Outside, Tumatuge, the centre of a crowd of hunters, was excitedly relating the latest news which he had just heard from Korauge the shaman.

"Vaamcho has become 'shir-man,'" Tumatuge was saying. "Why should our people be given nicknames? Korauge said: 'That is why old Vaal died.' Now, what sort of chief is Vaamcho, I ask you? He does not even possess a full team of dogs. Seven dogs instead of twelve! The spirits bore a grudge against such a shir-man-chief! That is why misfortune befell him."

The hunters shuddered as they listened to Tumatuge. O, Tumatuge was always first to know the news! No one was so often in Alitet's yarang as he was.

"Besides, what do we need chiefs for on the coast?" said Tumatuge. "We never had them before. People have lived and been born without any chiefs. The bearded Russian made them up. And what for? No one knows. I suppose the Bearded One wanted to breed his own tribe of shir-man-chiefs on the coast! Korauge said that the bear smelled the shir-man—that is why he came so close to the coast. It's never happened before. The grizzly bear lives in the hills. What has he to do here?"

"That must be right," thought the hunters. "Why didn't the bear kill old Vaal before, when Vaamcho was not yet shir-man?"

The thing became perfectly clear to everybody. Men were simply amazed how easily Korauge the shaman had unravelled the mystery. They would never have guessed it themselves! The sinister new word "shir-man" flew along the coast like a feather driven before the wind.

The news also penetrated to the yarang of Vaamcho, the chairman of the Tribal Soviet. It was an excited Alek who brought it. Emptying the ice into the tub and shaking with terror she began telling Vaamcho how Korauge had divined the bear's designs. It was said that her turn would be next if Vaamcho remained chief.

Vaamcho drew a paper out of a greasy little box. That paper said that Comrade Vaamcho was the chairman of the Enmakai Tribal Soviet. Vaamcho was not



able to "talk" with the paper, but the Russian chief had talked with it for him. It had all seemed amusing at the time and had even drawn a smile from Vaamcho. But see what that amusement had cost him—a bear had killed his father.

Vaamcho sat turning the paper over in his hands, thinking long and hard.

Alek sat down beside him. She slipped off her fur garments with a single movement of her shoulder, nestled up to Vaamcho and took his hand in hers, saying softly:

"Vaamcho, men say that you must hie you to Korauge.... You do not like him, I know. But you must go all the same.... Men do not talk for nothing. The being that lives in my belly wants you very much to go to Korauge. He does not want more evil to fall on our yarang."

Vaamcho glanced at his wife. There was a look of deep sorrow in his face. He placed his hand on her abdomen, stroked it and said:

"Tell him, the person that lives inside you, that I shall go at once to Korauge."

Vaamcho threw a parka over his shoulders, folded up the paper which he hid in his bosom and went out.

Alek watched him with radiant eyes.

Vaamcho, with drooping head and the air of a guilty boy, crept into the shaman's apartment. Korauge sat alone scratching his head with claw-like nails, hunting insects.

Without waiting for the usual greetings Vaamcho raised his eyes to the shaman and said:

"Korauge, now I too know why my father perished. Here it is, the shir-man paper."

"Give it here! I must have a good look at it!" croaked Korauge.

The shaman screwed up his eyes and spread the paper out on his skinny bare knees with trembling hands.

"There, see how it struggles to run away!" he growled.

Korauge clawed the paper and began studying it closely.

Vaamcho watched him breathlessly.

"Come closer!" Korauge beckoned him. "Look yourself. . . . Do you see hills on it? Look! and here at the side a bear's head is peeping out. . . ."

Vaamcho looked and a great terror seized him. At the bottom of the paper where the seal stood he could really make out the head of a bear and the outline of hills.

"Stop being shir-man! As for the paper, it must be burnt in a Tang fire. Make some shavings out of Tang boards, pour Tang lamp fat on them and set it alight! Take care that its foul smoke should not be blown on the yarangs. Let all the people of the settlement be gathered together. Let them see how it writhes and hisses in impotent fury against the power of the spirits. Unless you do this He will come and kill Alek when she next gathers edible roots. Here, take it!" And the shaman flung the paper from him with loathing.

Vaamcho picked it up and went out. In the passage he met Tygrena. He smiled shamefacedly and shrunk before her gaze. Tygrena, supporting her big stomach with her hands, stared at him with unblinking eyes. She waved her hand towards the door and said quietly:

"Go! What a foolish seal you are, Vaamcho!"

Soon all the people gathered at the edge of the settlement. On the little snow bank where once he had slain his favourite dog Chegit, Vaamcho laid out the wood shavings in a pile. The people crowded round the spot

and watched the shaman with bated breath. Korauge took a bottle of kerosene from under his garment, splashed its contents over the shavings, and said:

"Put a match to it!"

Vaamcho lit the fire which flared up so swiftly that he was obliged to spring back.

"Throw it in, quickly!" commanded the shaman.

Vaamcho threw the paper into the fire. It was consumed in an instant and no trace of it was left. The fire quickly died down.

"Pile snow on it so that the wind may level and destroy all trace of this foul spot."

Vaamcho went home, thinking: "The same smell as that on the bait by the Three Hills. That smell of Tang lamp fat one can never forget. . . . But how was it—all the women came to the fire, and only Tygrena did not come? What can it mean? Why did Tygrena look so angry when I met her in the passage? It is difficult to know what Tygrena thinks."

At the moment when the people gathered around the bonfire Tygrena was seized with the first pangs of childbirth and she withdrew quickly into her own special polog.

A woman must give birth alone and no one else must be present. It was forbidden even to look in at her. Neither could a burner be lighted. For the craft and wiles of the evil spirits know no bounds. The place where a human being was to be born had to be carefully concealed. But the spirits were very cunning. They had already raised a strong wind. The dry walrus skins covering the roof of the yarang rattled loudly. . . .

Tygrena lay in the dark polog on a specially prepared couch of reindeer skins. Her body was racked by terrible pains, but she knew that she dare not utter a single moan. The evil spirits must not know that a human being was to be born here. Did she not desire to become

a mother? She tried to stifle the agonizing pain with thoughts of the coming appearance of a new life, a new person who would grow up to be a real hunter or a real woman.

Ineffable joy struggled with excruciating pains. Now she would smile through a mist of tears, now listen fearfully to the raging wind. Sometimes she stopped breathing, terrified lest she reveal her presence. The wind moaned. The evil spirit must be somewhere close at hand.

With fear and anxiety in her heart she lay in an agony of suspense, waiting to hear the first cry of the newborn creature. Tygrena knew from the other women that delivery was sometimes difficult and the woman then had to be helped by having the child squeezed out by the aid of a board. But in such cases the evil spirit quickly discovers the spot where a person is being born and the child perishes.

No, Tygrena would not utter a sound, not if it took her three days to deliver herself. She would rather die in silence.

Suddenly the impulse to scream became overpowering. She dug her teeth into her hand until it bled, trying to kill that other dreadful pain. And every time she felt that she was losing consciousness Tygrena started to bite herself.

She felt hot. She wanted to drink. Her lips were parched. But she was now unclean and could not use the common vessels, and had not had time to prepare her own.

A crowd of women had gathered outside the polog. They wore a look of anxiety and each of them strained her ears to catch the child's cry or Tygrena's call for assistance. One might fail to hear the feeble voice of an exhausted woman in such a strong wind. But dead silence reigned in the polog of the suffering woman.

In the night Tygrena at last heard the voice of the new human being. Mustering her last feeble strength she did the ministrations herself. She tied the umbilical cord with a hair from her head, bit it off with her teeth, sprinkled it with the ash of burnt birch bark and fell back on the skins exhausted but happy.

The new human being wailed.

Tygrena raised herself with an effort and gazed into the child's face, whispering:

"Make a noise, little one! Do not be such a quiet person as your father Vaamcho!"

Hearing the child's cry the women outside exchanged joyful glances. One of them crept into Tygrena's log. She lighted the burner, then picked up the child and carried it out. The child was quickly rubbed down with snow and brought back to the warmth of its mother's body.

"Another hunter has arrived at our settlement," said the woman.

Alitet drove up on his dog-team. Grim and silent he made his way straight to his yarang without answering the men who accosted him. He had no sooner entered the passage than the wail of an infant struck his ears. Alitet stopped, listened and asked:

"What is that?"

"A son has been born, Alitet," answered one of the women.

Throwing off his parka Alitet hastened into his wife's apartment. Tygrena was dozing.

Alitet bent over the child, pulled it out of its mother's arms and looked into its eyes.

Tygrena started up and snatched the child away from him, clutching it to her bosom.

"I thought he would have light eyes, like the Merican," said Alitet disappointed.



CHAPTER TWENTY

Monstrous rumours crept all along the coast from settlement to settlement. So does a heavy mist come creeping up from yarang to yarang on the seashore, gradually shutting out the sun.

The new law of life which the bearded Russian chief had brought from the distant mainland swiftly assumed the shape of an evil spirit of sickness, affliction and calamity.

Soon after Vaamcho had burnt his paper in the public bonfire nearly all the chairmen of the Tribal Soviets came posthaste to the Revcom. They filled the room in an excited crowd.

Their sudden appearance surprised Los.

"What is the matter, comrades," he asked, not without agitation.

An elderly hunter stepped out of the crowd, took off his cap and wiped his perspiring face with it.

"Chief! Take back this paper that you have left in my yarang! It has taken my sleep from me. My wife fell very ill because of it. I am afraid to be shir-man-chief. Let Ayak, our shaman, be the chief. For him it is not taboo. He will be able to drive the evil spirits off if anything happens. He will make a good chief," said the chairman of the Tribal Soviet, laying his paper on the table.

"Well, and what have the others come here for?" asked Los.

"We have also brought our papers back," came the answer from all sides.

"Good. Put them on the table! But know this—I will not appoint any shaman as chairman. You may tell them so."

The chairman laid their credentials on the table one after another. Only one man, the chairman of the Loren

Tribal Soviet, Rynteu, stood motionless, staring at everybody with a puzzled look.

"Well, Rynteu, why don't you put your paper on the table?"

"I left my paper at home, in an empty teabox," answered the old man.

"Why didn't you bring it with you?"

"I have come on other business."

"Ah! I see!" exclaimed Los, visibly pleased.

He drew out his pipe and, amid a general silence, leisurely filled it, then lit up and said to the old man:

"You will have to wait, Rynteu, until I have done talking to these men."

"I can wait," said the old man.

The chairmen in their dark brown fur parkas stood huddled in a bunch. Their eyes gleamed with excitement in dark weatherbeaten faces. None of them plucked up courage to smoke.

"Comrades!" began Los. "Now listen to what I have to say. I know why you have come here. The news reaches us as well. Do you think I am not sorry for old man Vaal? I am very sorry. He was my great friend. He was a man with a great mind. He was a good old man. A man with a real heart."

The chairmen became attentive. Los puffed at his pipe and resumed:

"But I want to ask you all one thing—did anybody ever die before these papers appeared in your yarangs?"

"People die on the coast every year," answered a voice in the crowd.

"Have hunters stranded on a drifting ice floe ever perished?"

"It happens every year."

"Have bears not killed men before?"

The hunters were silent.

Then Rynteu slowly elbowed his way through the crowd and went up to the table.

"I will speak," the old man began. "I am older than you all. I saw the sun before any of you. When Charlie traded you all put up 'in my traveller's yarang. There is no other yarang on the coast which heard so much news as mine. And I remember all the news. Every year the grizzly bear kills one or another herdsman. Who was it killed Chang the herdsboy last summer? Was it not you, Kotkhyrgyn, who brought that news to my yarang? I heard it with these very ears." The old man pulled himself by the ears. "What are you? Silly seals? Why have you begun to forget so much? That is bad. You should 'not forget!" And the old man went back to his place.

Los stroked his beard, stood up and said:

"Comrades! I believe bad people are misleading you. Wicked people. People who do not want there to be good trading. Maybe they themselves want to carry on trade again in the old way? Like Charlie Red Nose, like Alitet! What do you think? But I shall not allow them to trade."

The men said nothing for a long time. Finally Kotkhyrgyn went up to the table, took one of the papers and said:

"I am taking back my paper."

"Wait a minute, Kotkhyrgyn, it may not be yours! Let me see!"

"And I take mine . . . and mine . . . and I too!" came other voices.

Los sorted out the certificates and gave them back to their owners.

"Loke, where is Loke? His paper is left."

"Loke has gone. He does not want to take it," someone said.

After this Los had a long talk with the chairmen, and it was evening before they took their departure.

When Zhukov came back from the hunt Los related to him what had taken place.

"It's very difficult, Nikita Sergeyevich, for us two to handle the whole coast," said Andrei thoughtfully.

"What we need is teachers, Andrei. Teachers and instructors and our own trading posts. The Americans are of no help to us in this matter. The people have got to have things explained to them. We've got to fight the shamans' influence."

"That's true enough, Nikita Sergeyevich, but that's not all. Explaining things won't carry you very far. I think to start with, the hunters should be given more for the eye than the mind."

"Nonsense! We need both."

"Let me finish. . . . Now, say, we ship out here a dozen or so whaleboats and distribute them with proper discrimination. The economic aspect is a very important thing, Nikita Sergeyevich."

"But we already wrote in about that early last winter. Have you begun to forget, as old Rynteu says? Maybe we haven't made out the case sufficiently strongly. Let's have a look at the outgoing files and see what we wrote."

They hunted up the "Re: Whaleboats" copy and Los went over it carefully.

"Of course, this is not the thing! Our argument should be this—motor-driven whaleboats are the only basis on which the backward whaling and seal hunting industry can be reconstructed. Here, find packet No. 93 in the box and we'll rewrite the thing." Los, with a grin, added: "That's the only advantage of our mail. You suddenly remember at the end of the year that you've messed up a report and fish it out again and rewrite it."

Andrei turned the long since "posted" mail out on the floor and began rummaging in it on hands and knees. After a search he found packet No. 93.

"Open it carefully so that we can slip the new report into the same packet."

Old Rynteu appeared in the doorway.

"Where did you disappear to, Rynteu? I was about to look for you. What business was it you wanted to see me about?" asked Los.

"Bad business. Very bad. Rultyna came to me with bad news. Charlie has sent Alitet to Haimelkol to get Mary and take the dogs from Yarak."

Los and Andrei looked at each other.

"Bad business," went on Rynteu. "I am afraid Rultyna will lose her mind. . . ."

"Yes, it's a bad business," said Los with a sigh. "What's to be done, Rynteu? What do you think?"

"I don't know," the old man answered evasively. "You know best."

"We must follow on Alitet's trail," said Los.

The old man nodded his head approvingly.

"You can't travel in the hills without a guide, Nikita Sergeyevich," said Andrei. "You're bound to lose your way."

"I know the way very well," said Rynteu. "Charlie used to send me into the hills for pelts. I'll show you the way."

"Good. Well, Andrei, let's go and finish the clipping of Alitet's wings. I'll show him what's what! How many days' journey is it, Rynteu?"

"The midnight sun has come now. We can do it in four days.

"Not what you'd call near. But we've got to go. While we're about it we'll see how people are living in the mountains. So that's decided!" said Los. "Shut up the office, Andrei."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The May sun beat down hotly. It was already quite warm, although the porous heavy snow still lay all around. Only the wind-swept mountainsides, on which the snow could not obtain a footing even in the winter, were bare and dark.

Los stood in the valley gazing at the mountains that stretched away in the distance.

"What's in those mountains?" thought Los. "Maybe platinum, gold or iron—who knows?" Turning to Andrei he said, pointing to the compass:

"Rynteu says this gadget doesn't work in the hills—points the wrong way. I asked him whether the sea lay on this side and he laughed and said: 'Don't look at that little box—look at the sun, and then you will know on which side the sea is.'"

"Apparently there's something in those mountains that throws the compass out, Nikita Sergeyevich. If only we had some kind of X-ray to take a peep at what's inside them!"

The dogs sprawled in the snow, dozing in the warm sun. Travelling was possible only at night when the sun was low and a light frost had hardened the trail. Ryn-teu had gone in search of faggots for lighting a fire to boil some water.

Polar owls flitted by one after another with a heavy flap of wings, turning their heads from side to side. They were the harbingers of a fox incursion. For owls signified the presence of lemmings, and after the lemmings would come the foxes.

The reindeer herds moved down closer to the sea coast where the summer breezes and air currents gave them relief from the pestering clouds of midges. No herd could be kept together in the hills during the summer. The lowland teems with lemmings, fair game for all

the wild creatures of the tundra who cram themselves with this prey. Even a reindeer, upon catching sight of a lemming, will toss its head and give chase. It kills the little creature with its hoof and devours it on the spot. Hares scamper in hundreds through the river valleys, nibbling the bark and leaves of the willows. Mountain rams bound from rock to rock. Here all life is on the move, everything leads a nomadic existence. The hills alone stand motionless as though wrapped in contemplation of the tundra life.

Old Ryn-teu came back to the sledges carrying two handfuls of willow twigs. The idea of boiling water for tea with this "firewood" tickled Los. But Ryn-teu, unperturbed, cut off small pieces of willow, split them down, laid them out cunningly and lit a fire. He tended it carefully, keeping the flame alive by a sparing use of the twigs.

"There's ingenuity for you!" said Los in admiration. "Learn the trick, Andrei, it may come in useful!"

"After tea we shall sleep," said Ryn-teu. "A mist is creeping up—it will soon be here. I cannot find the trail in a mist. To Alitet it is all the same. He travels in a mist as though the sun were shining."

After two days' travelling they came upon the frameworks of nomad dwellings. The dogs made a dash for what they thought to be habitation. But there was not a soul in sight. Everything around was desolate and deserted. And only the neat piles of chattels bore witness to recent occupation.

"What's this? Deserted?" enquired Los.

"No, they've left their belongings here. They'll pick them up in the winter, on the way back," Ryn-teu said.

"But where are the people?"

"They're nomads, they've moved on. Quite recently," said Ryn-teu closely examining the reindeer sledge tracks and tufts of reindeer hair lying in the snow.

The old man was reading the great book of the tundra.

"They departed at noon today," he said.

"What makes you think so?"

"The reindeer hair has not had time to sink into the snow under the sun. And here is the midday spoor of the reindeer. In the evening and the morning it is different. Alitet has been here."

Rynteu took Andrei by the hand led him aside with Los following.

"Look, this is the track of a nomad's sledge and this of a man of the coast—Alitet's sledge."

"Perhaps it is Yarak's sledge?"

"No," said the old man firmly. "When Yarak went away men did not ride on iron runners. This is the track of an iron runner. It is Alitet's. See how smooth it is?"

The old man went in search of Yarak's tracks and soon they heard him call:

"Here it is! I have found it!"

The tracks made by the unplated runners were less glossy and the surface was slightly concave and rough.

"Well, I'll be blowed! How simple it is!" cried Los in amazement.

"Rynteu, have the nomads gone far?" asked Andrei.

"No. They cannot go very far in one day. Now that we have struck their trail we can overtake them quickly. A heavy baggage train has passed. But keep a strong hold on the dogs. They go mad when they see reindeer. Take my gee pole. I can brake with my heels."

The dogs dashed off impetuously along the reindeer trail. Los and Andrei rode in front, Rynteu bringing up the rear. Suddenly the dogs pulled up short and lifted their heads with nervously twitching noses in the air, then tore off again at breakneck speed. Reindeer came in sight on the hillsides. A huge herd of reindeer! The dogs seemed to have run amuck.

"Pot-pot! Pot-pot!" shouted Los hoarsely, trying to head the team off.

Both he and Andrei made frantic efforts to brake the sledges with their gee poles, but the latter were dragged along by the madly racing team, leaving deep ruts behind them in the snow. The quivering dogs, with lolling tongues and blazing eyes bore steadily down on the herd.

"Pot-pot! Pot-pot!" cried old Rynteu.

It is a disgrace for a team driver if he proves unable to control his dogs and lets them tear a reindeer to pieces. The nomad men would laugh him to shame!

Old Rynteu swung his leg over the sledge, and straddling it dug both heels into the snow in an effort to check the team. But his heels slipped over the smooth snow and he could not bring the sledge to a stop.

A herdsman watching the approaching sledges suddenly waved his arms and rushed across their path. Flinging himself upon the first sledge he threw an arm round Andrei's neck for support, tore the gee pole out of his hand, drove it hard into the snow, bringing the team to a halt.

Rynteu's sledge flashed past with the old man making vain efforts to dig his heels into the snow. He blushed with shame. Jumping off the hurtling sledge he turned it over and threw himself upon the runners. The team came to a stop. The dogs began to howl.

"Aye! You here?" cried Andrei in astonishment.

"Two reindeer strayed from Yatkhyrgyn's herd. He sent me to look for them. I have been searching five days! I was now on my way to Haimelkot's herd to see if they were there. Suddenly I see your dogs making for the herd—I guessed at once who it was. I thought—those must be white men riding, they cannot brake the sledges. So I ran to help."

Aye talked to Andrei as to an old friend, staring

meanwhile hard at the bearded Russian chief, reports of whom had already reached the people of the hills.

"What is the news in the hills, Aye?"

Aye smiled sadly.

"What news can there be in the hills? Here we have only reindeer. Reindeer are born, reindeer die, there is nothing but reindeer. The news is on the coast. Life there is jolly, but here we live like wolves. All the time on the run. I think of leaving the nomad people. Ai, how I long for the coast!"

"Why do you want to leave, Aye?" asked Andrei.

"I am miserable here. I am tired of running about. My master Yatkhyrgyn says that I have strong legs. He always sends me to search for stray reindeer. And so he keeps me running all the winter. Yet I fear to leave. My master, when he was yet a young man, became a chief. The Russians had sent a paper to his father. When his father died Yatkhyrgyn took the paper. Only he does not know what is written in the paper. He has a chief's knife as well. I saw it. A long thin knife called a dirk. He uses it for slaughtering reindeer. He gave me the paper and told me, if ever I met a Russian, to find out what it is about."

Aye drew out from his bosom something wrapped up in a rag, carefully unfolded it and handed Andrei a dirty scrap of paper.

"Why, it's an oath of allegiance to the tsar!" said Andrei.

"Read it!" said Los.

Making out the illegible script with difficulty, Zhukov read the following:

"I do hereby solemnly swear before God the Creator that I shall be a faithful, obedient and good subject with all my family to the Great, True and Good Tsar of all the Russias Alexander Nikolayevich

and his Royal Majesty's Heir Nikolai Alexandrovich, that I shall have no traffic with foreign lands, that I shall make no friendships with his Royal Majesty's enemies, that in all that pertains to his sublime Royal Majesty's power and jurisdiction I shall to the best of my intelligence and ability protect and defend without sparing my life and help his Royal Majesty in every way I can, that should I learn anything ill or damaging to the Tsar I shall report it and prevent it, that I shall honour all secrets, entrusted to me. All this I will faithfully fulfil with God's help. I kiss the holy Gospels and do swear by the Crucifix of my Creator. So help me God."

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Los. "What d'you think of that grand duke with his dirk! And where? In the Arctic mountains of all places!"

"The last bulwark of tsarism," said Andrei with a laugh, and turning to Aye he asked: "May I keep this paper?"

"I am afraid Yatkhyrgyn may ask for it," said Aye irresolutely.

"Tell him that this paper is no good any more. There aren't any more tsars"

"All right, you know best," acquiesced Aye.

The reindeer herd had moved down the other slope of the hill. Aye drove with Andrei to Haimelkot's camp, Los getting into the other sledge with Ryn-teu. The dogs ran on quietly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

With the arrival of Alitet in Haimelkot's camp the peaceful tenor of men's lives was completely upset. Nobody could understand why Alitet had come to the hills on the very eve of the spring floods. At first people

had thought that he had come for fox pelts, but Alitet did not even enquire about them. Everybody was on the alert. Particularly Yarak. He did not absent himself from the camp and hung on Alitet's heels.

It was Alitet's third day at the camp, and still he had not said a word of what had brought him here. He gorged himself all the time with reindeer meat, as though mustering his strength. When all the camp was asleep Yarak roamed about half-dozing. He had sent Mary to the Hare's Trail valley, ostensibly for twigs, and bidden her not to come back until Alitet had gone.

Old Haimelkot was perfectly aware of the reason why his niece Mary had run away with Yarak and why they were living here. The presence of the uninvited guest, Alitet, irked the old man. But he bore himself with the dignity of a true herder and did not betray his curiosity. Alitet himself, at the end of the third day, told Haimelkot what had brought him.

"You must ask Mary! She is not a reindeer, she can speak for herself. If she wants to, let her go," said Haimelkot.

"She does not wish to go. Charlie told me to bring her back."

Haimelkot smiled:

"A reindeer may be caught and led whither one wishes. It is a dumb beast, a reindeer. But Mary . . . I didn't know that she had antlers growing, over which one could throw a lasso."

"Rultyna and Charlie both said that I was to bring her," repeated Alitet.

The old man screwed up his eyes and wrinkled his nose. After a pause he said:

"Do you take Haimelkot to be a little child? I have lived a long life and know exactly what my sister Rultyna thinks. And have you long turned Tang that you no longer know whether a girl needs a husband or not?"

Come, lead the stag out of the herd and see whether the females will remain! You had better go to sleep. Afterwards you can have a talk with Yarak. He is her husband."

And when Alitet slept Haimelkot called Yarak and said to him:

"Do not leave the camp! Call me when Alitet begins to talk with you about Mary. You are young and will not know how to talk to that wolf."

"I'll kill him!" cried Yarak vehemently.

"With a knife a weak man can kill a strong one. Hide your knife away. Go to sleep. Lack of sleep makes a man weak."

Two dog-teams appeared racing down the hillside. Thinking it was Charlie a pang of fear shot through Yarak's heart. But suddenly he cried:

"Aye has brought the Russians!" and rushed to meet them.

The sledges stopped.

"Kakomei! Los!" cried Yarak, delighted.

"How do you do, how do you do, Yarak!" said Los shaking hands. "I've come to pay you a visit, you see."

"And Andrei, and Rynteu and Aye here too! Kakomei!" exclaimed Yarak, beaming with joy. "Here is the host himself, my uncle," he said, pointing to Haimelkot who was coming towards them.

Haimelkot, as he approached, keenly examined the unusual visitors. He came up with an unhurried and grave dignity. Los took an instant liking to the old man, whose shrewd face and penetrating eyes impressed him. Holding out his hand he said:

"How do you do, Haimelkot!"

The old man's face broke into a restrained smile. He said: .

"Do you know Haimelkot?"

"By hearsay," answered Los.

"Women! Cook the fattest reindeer! Worthy guests have arrived, it seems!" cried Haimelkot.

They all went over to the campfire, over which hung a huge copper cauldron. A little tot in fur clothes, resembling an ungainly bear cub, stumbled across their path. His face was covered with dirt and reindeer blood. Los snatched him up in his arms, and shaking him in the air, asked in Russian:

"Well, little man, how's business?"

The little man set up a wild howl.

"Come, come! I treat you nicely and you behave like that! Here's a lump of sugar. Go on, trot off!" chuckled Los.

"He does not understand anything. Too little. And it's the first time he sees a Tang," said Haimelkot, apologetically as it were.

"Yarak, I do not see Mary! Where is she?" asked Los.

"She went to the river valley to gather willows for the fire. She has been gone a long time," said Yarak in a whisper. "She fears Alitet. Afraid he will take her back to Charlie."

"Let him try!"

Haimelkot gave Los an approving pat on his broad back. That meant that Haimelkot considered him to be a real man.

The hill camp was a temporary abode. There were no yarangs here, only a few skin tents standing under the open sky. Even in the winter and during a blizzard, people used a warm dwelling only for sleeping purposes. On getting up they would take down the skin tent and the women would beat out the icing that had formed on the skins overnight. People of all ages lived in the open air, whatever the weather. A man does not freeze if he keeps awake and walks.

There were numerous baggage sledges standing about Haimelkot's camp. These were roughly made vehicles on

heavy runners which served for the transportation of chattels and dwellings. Here too stood light travelling sledges of delicate workmanship which looked like toys beside the clumsy transports. One could easily pick up such a sledge and carry it away under his arm.

"Aye, what is that hanging on the pole?" asked Andrei.

"It's a baby. Do you want to look at it?"

In a fur bag strung to a post driven into the snow hung a little individual. Two birdlike black little eyes peeped out from the edge of the bag. To all appearances it resembled a little bird in its nest. Swaying gently in the breeze with the warm sun overhead it looked, and probably was, enjoying itself immensely.

"It cannot walk yet," explained Aye.

The meat was cooking in the cauldron over a roaring fire. The women sat watching it. The meat had to be taken out before the water came to the boil. The old man had ordered the meat to be cooked in the proper way, so that it looked appetizing. The tender pink venison, if skilfully cooked, does not burden the stomach. One can eat a large quantity of such meat. Eating competitions are sometimes held in the tundra, there being eaters who can dispatch almost a whole reindeer at a single sitting. After such a meal the eater rolls himself on his stomach and is ready to run after the herds without a morsel of food for two or three days at a stretch.

The women pulled the meat out of the cauldron with pointed sticks and laid it on a large wooden platter. The meat gave off a very appetizing smell. Haimelkot set out the choicest chunks for Los and Andrei. The magnitude of these portions startled the white guests, but they were still more astonished at the ease with which they dispatched them.

The other guests had long finished off the reindeer and were carefully picking the bones.

"Very good meat, Haimelkot! That was a good reindeer," said Los approvingly.

"Every guest who comes to Haimelkot will find a good piece of meat. No one has ever left Haimelkot hungry. Women, cook another reindeer," said the old man.

Alitet awoke and heard the voices of the Russians. He grinned with satisfaction and lay on, straining his ears to catch the talk. At length he got up and went over to the campfire.

"Good day, Russki chief!" said Alitet ingratiatingly. "This is a great festival for Haimelkot. See, how many guests have gathered!"

Alitet squatted down.

"What have you come here for?" demanded Los.

"Every man has business to attend to. Even the beasts run after something in the tundra. . . . Charlie sent me to take the dogs from Yarak. . . . Charlie sold them to me."

"Did you buy them?" demanded Los sternly.

Alitet, after a little hesitation, confirmed that he did.

"And did you buy Mary too?" asked Andrei.

"Charlie said to me: 'Take away the dogs and bring Mary back.' The dogs are his and the girl is his. They were stolen."

Yarak sprang to his feet, but Haimelkot caught him by the arm and drew him back to his seat.

"You will not take anybody from here. Do you understand that?" said Los.

"Chief, I do not know your law. I did what Charlie told me. And Rultyna, Mary's mother, also asked me to go."

Old Rynteu, who had been attentively following the conversation while busy with a bone, said:

"Rultyna did not ask you, Alitet. I know it. Haimelkot also knows that his sister Rultyna did not ask Alitet.

It is not good when a man lies!" he said with a deprecating shake of the head.

"We are setting out tomorrow," said Los, "and you are going with us, Alitet. Get ready."

"If you wish it, I can go. If Mary must not be taken let her remain here. Only seven of my dogs bit through their traces and ran back to the coast together with the lead dog. I don't know how I shall be able to go now," said Alitet.

"I will give him my dogs!" cried Yarak. "Let him only go!"

"No!" Los objected. "He can travel with Rynteu in the same sledge."

"That's right!" readily agreed the old man. "We can harness the rest of his dogs to my team and take his sledge in tow."

"Rynteu," said Alitet, "we must lose no time. The sun shines hotly. How shall we cross the rivers when the water comes?"

"That is true, Alitet," answered Rynteu.

Andrei went with Aye to the river valley. They were very glad to see each other. It had been so long since they had last met!

Haimelkot liked the bearded Russian, and he proposed to Los to go and see his herd. A team of beautiful white reindeer were swiftly harnessed to a light travelling sledge.

"Come with us too, Yarak!" said Los.

"No, I will remain here."

"You have nothing to fear, Yarak. Bear in mind that nobody will harm you as long as I live in this land. It was because of you I came down here. Ask the old nian. Rultyna sent him to me."

Yarak smiled in relief.

"Thank you, Los! My heart ceased beating fast when I saw you coming."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The Revcom men spent two days in Haimelkot's camp, during which time Los acquainted himself with the methods of deer farming. He was very much astonished to find that Haimelkot, the owner of two thousand head of reindeer, was really a miserably poor man. The economy was run on a primitive self-supporting basis. People lived on the meat of the reindeer and wore clothes of reindeer skins, and that was all. The animals roamed almost wild about the tundra, shifting to new pasture grounds when the moss had all been eaten, and people followed them like the foxes followed the mice. Many reindeer perished from the wolves, hoof disease, accidents, and early calving during the season of severe spring frosts. And hundreds of thousands of reindeer such as these pastured in the Chukotsk tundra.

"Yes, something's got to be done about this," thought Los, not seeing clearly yet himself in what way this livestock problem was to be properly managed.

On the night of the third day two sledges rode out of the Haimelkot camp. Rynteu and Alitet rode in front. Alitet's sledge, hitched on behind, wobbled from side to side and acted as a drag on the team's progress. Los incessantly braked his sledge. The team strained at the traces, eager and impatient. Slow travelling tires a driver and makes him feel sleepy, whereas swift travel is stimulating. Even the dogs feel better when running at a good speed.

A mist stole up on the horizon and began to roll out on all sides, descending lower and lower. Soon the hill-tops were lost in the thick pall.

"The mist eats the snow up like flame. We must hurry, or we shall be caught in the flood tide, Rynteu," said Alitet.

He was excited, as though the mist worried him, but, fidgeting restlessly in the sledge, he secretly invoked the spirits to send down a heavier mist.

"The mist will not disperse, Alitet. There is no wind, not a breath of air," said Rynteu uneasily.



The mist advanced to meet them and soon covered the earth. The teams seemed to be sailing in moist white clouds. The sweeping sky hanging over the tundra disappeared.

"That damned Alitet is only holding us up. Hitched his sledge up behind. I've a good mind to drop him and let him go on his five dogs as best he can," said Zhukov in annoyance.

"I can't get those reindeer out of my head, Andrei. What an industry going to waste! Why, even the fish in Kanichatka waters have been included in the state trading plans." And Los, with the gee pole in his hand, shouted at the dogs as they sped across the smooth surface of the snow. Only the backs and bushy tails of the shaft pair could be dimly seen in the heavy mist.

"And here we have immense herds just wandering about like mice in the tundra. We must call a conference of reindeer breeders."

In crossing small ravines over the wet snow the sledge sometimes foundered and glided over the brittle ice of a mountain stream.

"A scratch team always runs badly. We must go faster, Rynteu," advised Alitet.

"Yes, yes! Let the Tangs ride in front. Our dogs will then run more willingly," said Rynteu, not suspecting Alitet's evil designs.

Rynteu halted his team and went up to Los.

"Los, we must hurry. In two more days the rivers may be covered with water. We shall then have to stay in the tundra until the summer. You go ahead and I will shout out to you which way to go."

"Very well!" said Los, pleased with the idea.

He drove his team out ahead. Behind him Rynteu's dogs set off at a livelier pace.

Alitet peered intently into the mist, keenly alert, and whispered:

"Keep to the left, more to the left. The dogs take too much leeway."

"Lo-os! Keep to the left!" shouted Rynteu.

"Krr! Krr!" cried Los to the dogs, and the team obediently veered to the left.

"Here, Rynteu, have a smoke!" said Alitet.

The old man fished out his pipe and held it out gladly. Alitet struck a match on the sledge and they lit up.

"Left, more left!" urged Alitet with growing excitement.

The precipice for which he was heading the Russians' team was somewhere on the left. Judging by the time which they had been travelling they should have reached it already. Alitet inwardly raged and cursed himself for not knowing the trail well enough. "If the team misses the precipice what was the sense in Alitet's coming here? What was the sense in letting loose seven of the dogs during the night? The only thing is to double back on their own tracks and come down again." He was on the point of telling Rynteu to stop the sledge when he heard a shout.

Alitet sprang out of the sledge as quick as lightning and threw himself flat on the ground, digging his hunter's knife into the hard snow on the very edge of the precipice and clutching it for dear life. The next instant Rynteu and his team disappeared into the abyss.

Alitet lay for a long time without stirring. Then, rais-

ing his head, he crawled slowly backwards, stood up, ran back a few paces and stopped again.

"Rynteul!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

There was no reply. Alitet drew a sigh of relief, wiped his perspiring face with his cap and walked away into the tundra, swallowed up in the thick mist.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

As an eclipse of the sun throws the tundra people into a turmoil, so did the visit of the two Russian men to Haimelkot's camp cause a great stir and give rise to a host of conjectures. Here, indeed, was food for thought!

Haimelkot even withdrew himself into the seclusion of the tundra where he could think without interference. The conversation with the bearded Russian chief had greatly disturbed him. Indeed, why should the Tangs come to the tundra to heal the reindeer? Illnesses were spirits. They had to live somewhere, these spirits, have their abode in someone. When the time came they would depart. No man lives without illness, and no reindeer can live without it. And did not the people of the hills breed large herds without the aid of the Tangs? Did not his father Ukvyllkot have a large herd? And that herd still lived. Ho-ho! That was funny! The Tangs going to heal the reindeer, as the Bearded One said! How could they know what was in a reindeer's mind? Now he, Haimelkot, had spent all his life amid the herd. How many times had he slept during a blizzard under a reindeer's belly! Yet he never knew all the thoughts of a reindeer. He knew what places reindeer liked to choose for calving, knew when and where they should be moved out of the way of the gnats, knew the places where they might split their hooves. He knew how to determine by divination with a reindeer's shoulder blade the proper trail which

a herd should take. He knew how to hold the bone over the campfire so that a fissure was made by the heat indicating the direction in which good pasturage lay instead of bare rocks. How could the Tangs know all this?

Old Haimelkot sat on a stone ledge, sunk deep in thought. Utter silence reigned around. The mist began to lift and patches of sky appeared.

The memory of Alitet brought an amused smile to the old man's face. Haimelkot had liked the way the bearded chief had lassoed Alitet. Like a wild stag that enticed the females from the herd. The old man had taken a hearty dislike to Alitet himself, and when the Russian scolded him Haimelkot saw that the bearded chief stood for right. That was good and just. But that talk about the reindeer he did not like at all.

Mary appeared over the crest of the hill with a bundle of willow faggots. She came up to the old man and deposited her burden on the ground.

"Have a rest, Mary. You have grown pale. Perhaps it is because your father is white. Now you can sleep in peace. Alitet will not take you away. He is afraid of the bearded Russian."

"I watched the dog sledges from afar. I thought Charlie himself had come after Alitet. These three days I lived on roots and the hoards which I found in mice holes."

"Did you take all the hoards from them?"

"No, Haimelkot, I took only a half of each hoard."

"You did well, Mary. You must not rob the little mouse of everything—it will die of hunger before it finds more food."

The old man got up and wanted to take the bundle of faggots, but Mary took it from him in silence and throwing it on her back she followed Haimelkot. When they came within sight of the camp Yarak ran forward to meet them. He took the bundle from Mary and burst into a merry laugh.



"Have you heard the news, Mary? Los has been here. Alitet obeys him like an old sledge reindeer does the teamster. He does whatever he is told."

And turning aside Yarak shouted:

"Thank you, Los!"

Los was in everybody's thoughts and on everybody's tongue in the camp of Haimelkot. He had come into people like a good spirit and set them thinking about their lives.

Aye sat all day at the campfire, thinking. But thinking alone was very hard. Seeing Yarak he said:

"Let us go, Yarak, and think. Over there, by that little hill. I fear to speak my thoughts before other people."

They walked on in silence amid the hushed tundra. The only sound was the clicking of reindeer hooves, resembling the faint noise of receding ice fields.

"Yarak," said Aye quietly, when they had settled themselves down by the hill, "Los told me: 'In the summer when the ship comes we shall send you to learn on the Russian Mainland. There is a big, big settlement there called Petrograd. There are more people living in that one settlement than in the whole Chukotsk land!' What will I have to learn there? I cannot understand. I have been thinking all night but am none the wiser. My head is in a daze. It's hard to think by one's self."

"You go, Aye! I do not think it will be bad. Did you notice how Los spoke to Alitet and how he spoke to you? His eyes looked different each time. Clearly he wishes you well, he does not wish you harm."

"But Yarak, they said themselves that there are no reindeer in that land, no walruses or seals. How am I going to live? I shall die."

"Aye, when Charlie sent me to work on the American whaler there was a lot of meat of the whale and the walrus on the ship but the Americans did not eat it. We were icebound for many days, and I was left without

food. Then I began to eat their food out of iron little boxes and remained alive."

Aye listened attentively to Yarak. It was very interesting to learn how the Tangs lived and what they ate. Yarak had lived with them—he knew them well.

"You have to get used to it, Aye. There is food everywhere. Los means well—he wants to do something good for you. It is Alitet he does not like."

"Alitet is a bad man, a wicked man. He left me without a wife. I suppose Tygrena no longer remembers me."

Aye's face wore a look of distress and longing. He quailed at the thought of going to the land of the Tangs, but what could he do? He did not want to live in the hills and there was no life for him on the coast either. Aye heaved a sigh and said:

"I shall go, Yarak. Come what may!"

While they were talking the mist had lifted.

They retraced their steps to the camp and suddenly saw a man slowly dragging his feet.

"Yarak, look! That's Alitet."

Yarak rubbed his eyes hard.

Yes, it was Alitet.

"Yarak, you have turned pale. Do you fear him? Fear not, for now I shall help you. If he tries to take Mary away we shall kill him. He has poured such wrath into my heart that I will let his guts out as I would a reindeer's," cried Aye in a towering passion.

In the camp people were already crying:

"Alitet is coming! Alitet!"

Mary ran out of her tent, and seeing Alitet she screamed and darted off in the opposite direction.

Yarak and Aye raced down the hillside towards her.

They ran so fast that their faces were flushed and their caps flew off and dangled from their straps down their backs.

Haimelkot stood calmly in the centre of the camp, thinking: "What made Alitet come back?"

Aye pulled out his knife and concealed it behind his back.

"Give me that knife, Aye," said Haimelkot. "You are strong lads. Or have you grown so weak that you possess no strength without a knife? Why difle my land with the blood of that man? The moss will cease to grow here. And you, too, Yarak, give me your knife."

"Haimelkot, take mine as well," said Mary.

The old man took the knives, laid them on the snow and stood on them.

Alitet came up.

"The Tangs have disappeared," he said in a casual tone. "Rynteu as well. They must have fallen over a precipice."

"How is it that you did not disappear? Did you not travel together?" cried Aye.

"Hold your tongue, you whelp! Or do you think I am talking to you, you wretch! You wifeless man!"

Aye, in a fit of fury, made a dash for Alitet, but Haimelkot seized him by the girdle.

"The conversation is not finished yet!" he said to Aye. "Speak, Alitet!"

Alitet sat down on the snow and held his stomach, his face contorted as though in pain.

"How did you manage to lose them? Did you not ride on Rynteu's sledge?" asked Haimelkot.

"I must have ate too much fat meat," groaned Alitet. "I had to go off the sledge very often and my belly still aches."

Aye quivered with rage. He was well aware that the only precipice hereabouts was Bear's Ear, and that lay quite off the trail.

"Maybe you purposely directed them to the Bear's Ear," cried Aye.

"... Silence! Or I shall give you such a blow you will bite your tongue off," said Alitet.

"Aye is right," said Haimelkot. "Bear's Ear is entirely out of the way. How came you there? It is a deadly spot. Last year the wolves drove eight reindeer over it during a blizzard. The reindeer were dashed to death."

"Merkichkin, Alitet!" swore Yarak, and turning to Aye he asked: "Do you know the spot?"

"I know it very well. I passed it not long ago."

"Let us go there at once. We must look for them."

Haimelkot said:

"It is very far to go on foot. Take my reindeer team, it will take you there quickly."

The young men ran off to harness the reindeer.

Alitet got up, came close up to the old man and whispered:

"If they go on your reindeer the spirits will be angered and your herd will perish from disease."

Haimelkot started. After a moment's thought he cried out:

"Yarak, wait with the harnessing! I'm afraid the reindeer cannot be used."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

A heavy mist hung over the foot of the precipice. Here amid a mass of fallen snow lay Los. Consciousness returning to him with a stab of pain he opened his eyes.

"Where are the rest of 'em? What's happened to the dogs?... O-o-oh, hell!" he groaned. "Something wrong with the leg." Summoning all his strength he shouted: "Andre-e-e-ei!"

The cry re-echoed down the cliffside.

"Ehe-e-e-ei!" shouted Los still louder.

And again nothing but the echo answered him.

Fighting back the sharp pain Los struggled into a sitting position and began to explore his injured leg.

"Thought so. Broken. Lucky it's not bleeding. . . . But what's happened to Andrei?"

Los began to recollect what had happened.

"When we were falling I felt Andrei quite close to me. That means he can't be far off. He's a lighter weight than I am. . . . Who of us would fall faster? He was on my right. Maybe I turned a somersault and my right side has now become the left?" Los made his deductions in imitation of old Rynteu when he studied the tracks at the deserted nomad's camp.

Despite the intense pain in his leg Los heaved himself up on his elbows and began to crawl slowly forward, searching the fresh heaps of snow on either side. He broke out into a sweat from the painful effort. After several yards of this arduous progress he gave himself a rest, and placing two fingers in his mouth emitted a piercing whistle.

"Malchik, Malchik!"* he shouted, calling his lead dog, but the cry was lost amid the desolate wilderness.

"Pretty rotten outlook," he thought glumly. "Where have they all got to? Buried in the avalanche?" He smiled ruefully and said aloud:

"No use trying to crawl to the coast."

Los recalled the civil war and his armoured train. . . . There death had been a constant companion and Los had become accustomed to looking it in the face. But here amid these white rocks and unearthly stillness he experienced for the first time the fear of death.

"How terribly stupid, confound it. . . . The bearded chief destroyed by the spirits. . . . Ah, Natasha! . . ."

He felt for his pipe and a splintered box of matches, and, lying on his back, began to smoke.

* Boy (Russian).—*Trans.*

"Los doesn't go under so easy—we've still got some fight!" he shouted out to the skies.

Suddenly he heard the growling of a dog.

"Andre-e-ei!" cried Los.

The dog barked.

Los crawled in the direction of its voice and soon came across a sledge lying buried in the snow. In the sledge lay the huddled figure of Rynteu with a crushed skull. The snow around the sledge was stained with blood. One dog sat in the traces, greedily devouring the blood-stained snow.

Los had seen many dead men during his life at the front but never had a corpse had such a depressing effect upon him as the body of this old man. The end of the reins to which the traces were attached had been bitten through. The whole team with the exception of the shaft dog had evidently run away.

Los untied the dog, fastened the leash to his belt and swiftly crawled away.

He went suddenly cold at the thought that he would next come across Andrei's body. Remembering how the dog had been devouring the bloody snow he said to himself "No, I won't allow you to feed on my flesh. Before life parts this body I'll kill you."

The dog, as though guessing his thoughts, suddenly bristled and snarled. Los started. At the same instant his keen ears caught a faint sound, as of someone yawning nearby.

Los took off his cap and listened. Not a murmur. Not a sign of life anywhere. The dog strained silently at the leash. Los unfastened it from his belt and holding the end in his hand let the dog on ahead and crawled after it.

While still at a distance he saw Andrei's head on the snow. The body was buried to the shoulders. Los darted forward and barely had he reached Andrei when he dropped unconscious.

"Nikita Sergeyevich! Seems I fell asleep," said Andrei, opening his eyes.

Releasing one of his arms he touched Los' face and beard.

"Sergeyevich! Why don't you answer?"

Andrei tried to get up. His revolver pressed painfully against his chest. Shovelling the snow away with his one free hand Andrei was soon able to thrust his hand into the wide opening of his fur shirt. He pulled out his revolver. A shot rang out, sending a loud report re-echoing amid the cliffs. When the sound died down Andrei fired two more shots.

"Andrei, who's that shooting..." said Los, coming to.

"Sergeyevich! You're alive?" cried Andrei, overjoyed.

"Looks like it," said Los with a smile. "Mustn't die yet—too many things to do."

"Why are you crawling, Sergeyevich?"

"Something wrong with my leg. Fractured. Wants putting in a splint."

"I'll go and look for the sledge and break off some slats."

"Wait a minute, Andrei, don't go. Wait till the mist clears, or we'll lose each other again."

"Let's have a pick-me-up, Sergeyevich "

Andrei pulled out a big bar of chocolate.

"What rotten luck, Andrei," said Los, breaking off a piece of chocolate. "Right from the start. And that Thompson fellow's been living here over twenty years and has never had anything happen to him, the darned moneygrubber!"

The mist lifted and revealed the huge cliff with great mounds of snow lying in a chaos at its foot. Nearby could be seen the back of Rynteu's sledge. Andrei got up and went to fetch some fragments for making splints

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

As the time for Mr. Thompson's departure for America drew near things took an uncomfortable turn for him. He received a letter from the Revcom instructing him to bring the balance of his stock of furs to the provincial centre for sale at fixed prices. This arrangement, naturally, pleased him not at all. The fifteen hundred pelts which had remained on his hands as a result of the non-arrival of the schooner Mr. Thompson regarded as his own inalienable property. His arrangements with Alitet for shipping them across to America had long been made and Mr. Thompson impatiently waited for his coming. Rultyna noticed her husband's restlessness and began to suspect that Charlie was planning mischief.

On meeting Rultyna by the store Charlie spoke to her with unusual amiability.

"Rultyna, the schooners have stopped coming to me. The Russians have forbidden me to trade, but we can't live without products. I shall have to go to America to bring some over."

"You know, Charlie, what you have to do," said Rultyna meekly.

Mr. Thompson was on the point of saying that he intended to take Ben with him to show him America, but he thought better of it.

He went into the store and examined the bales of furs sewn up in burlap and an old ironbound chest containing his bank documents and cash. He sat down on the chest, lit his pipe and mused: "My whole life's in this chest. It hasn't been wasted. I've managed to save up a pretty sum. It now remains to get away and save this last batch of furs from the Russians."

Suddenly he heard the boys outside shouting:

"Alitet! Alitet!"

Mr. Thompson ran out, and seeing the sail of the whaleboat on the horizon, hurried into his room.

"Rultyna, send the children to me!" he shouted.

The little room was filled with children. They stood around their father's rocking chair in a timid group.

"Come closer, children! Come closer, Ben!" He embraced them and said:

"I am going to America for a short time. Let each of you tell me what he wants for a present. Ask whatever you want, I will bring it."

"Bring some chewing gum, Charlie," said audacious Bertha of the oblique eyes.

"All right, I will bring a whole case of chewing gum. Well, and what do the others want? What shall I bring you, Ben?"

"Bring me a small rifle, a light one. I will shoot the seals from the shore. People say when you kill a seal yourself the meat is very tasty."

Mr. Thompson drew a heavy sigh and said almost in a whisper:

"All right, Ben, all right! I shall bring you a rifle for sure."

Rultyna stood outside the door listening to the talk between the father and her children. Charlie was talking kindly to all of them without discrimination. She had never known him to do so before.

A mist came down and hid the midnight sun. The whaleboat was approaching the shore, and the children ran out to the beach. Mr. Thompson hastened out after them. He greeted Alitet warmly.

"I have been waiting for you a long time, Alitet. I have everything ready. Tell the men to get the fur bags and the chest loaded quickly. They are in the store."

Mr. Thompson glanced at Mr. Simons' trading post, then, after a moment's reflection, went over to see his

countryman. It was a long time since he had last seen him!

"Ah! Thompson! I'm delighted!" cried Mr. Simons.

"I'm sorry, Simons, if I've offended you in any way...." he began in embarrassment.

"Not at all, Thompson, not at all!"

"I've decided to take your advice, Simons. I'm going away, going for good. Don't think ill of the old man!"

"That's jolly good, Thompson! I wish you luck. When do you intend leaving?"

"Now, this very minute. Good-bye, Simons."

"Wait a minute! I'll come down and see you off."

"Thanks. You'd better not. Please don't!..."

Mr. Thompson went out and made his way swiftly towards the beach. He counted the number of bales, glanced at the chest, then enquired anxiously:

"Where is Ben?"

"You forgot to take your gloves. He ran in to get them," answered Rultyna.

The oarsmen had already taken their places in the whaleboat. Alitet stood at the helm. Mr. Thompson alone was still on the beach waiting impatiently for Ben.

Ben ran up breathless and handed the gloves to his father. Mr. Thompson put them on, swung his leg over the side, then brought it back again. He glanced at Ben and asked:

"Ben, would you like to see walrus hunting?"

The boy's eyes gleamed.

Without waiting for a reply Mr. Thompson lifted Ben and lowered him into the whaleboat. Pushing it off he jumped in after him.

"Charlie, Ben is not wearing his travelling boots!" cried Rultyna.

But the whaleboat had already sheered off. Ben waved his hand and shouted:

"Rultyna, my boots are still good! I will bring you fresh liver!"

"Tumatuge, hoist the sail!" commanded Alitet.

The whaleboat swiftly disappeared into the mist.

Rultyna stood on the beach. Fear for her son gripped her. "Charlie has taken Ben. He has probably taken him for good. My eyes shall never see him again." And Rultyna cried in a voice of despair:

"Ben! Ben!"

She sank on the pebbly beach and gazed long at the mist-shrouded sea. Recollections of her long life came crowding into her mind. She had never spoken with Charlie as other women had spoken with their husbands. It was very hard to live with a white man. But now she would go home and talk to her children in a full voice and not in a whisper as she always did. Her throat had become spoilt through whispering. She peered into the misty distance for another fleeting glimpse of the whaleboat. For Ben was there! A haze of tears suffused her eyes.

She sat for a long time on the beach in the hope that the mist would lift. There was not a soul about. Somewhere in the distance shots rang out. The men would soon bring home fresh sweet meat. There would be a walrus feast.

Bertha ran up to Rultyna and whispered to her to come home.

"You must speak loudly, Bertha," her mother said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The whaleboat steered a course 35° northeast. Mr. Thompson had set that course. Alitet stood at the rudder staring at the compass. Here and there ice floes appeared on the surface of the sea.

Mr. Thompson sat on his ironbound chest. He had one arm around Ben, holding him close as though he feared he would run away. He stared silently back at the shore on which he had spent half of his life, but the shore was hidden in the mist. A dim sense of regret assailed him.

Charles Thompson was now on his way to civilization. How would he fit himself into the noisy bustling life? A sudden fear gripped his heart. He had a terrified impulse to turn the whaleboat back. He would have done so had there not come the sobering thought that there, on the coast, Mr. Los held sway. He glanced at his chest and whispered to Ben:

"This contains all our life, Ben. You and I shall be rich people. To save the capital we shall start a little business of our own. We shall not be in need of anything."

But Ben was not listening to his father. He was peering intently at the surface of the water where now and then a seal would swim up.

Mr. Thompson went over to Alitet on the bow.

"Now the Russki will not be able to walk for a long time. I made a little mistake. I missed the rocks—they dropped on the smooth snow," said Alitet, leaning over to Charlie's ear.

"Alitet, I shall not come back for the winter trade. The Russians will be in my way. They escaped with their lives after all. I shall bring goods on the schooner in summer."

"Very good!" exclaimed Alitet. "Only do not come to Enmakai settlement. Sail to Bird's Beak gorge. No one lives there and no one will see. I shall wait for you there in summer."

The whaleboat ran smoothly, tacking amid the ice floes. Dawn had broken, and with it the rays of the sun struggled here and there through the mist. Alitet was anxious for a glimpse of the coast line. A compass was

a good thing, but there was no harm in keeping sight of the cliffs.

"Stop, stop!" Alitet suddenly cried in a loud whisper to the oarsmen. "Look, Charlie, look! There's a walrus lying on the ice!"

Mr. Thompson brought the binoculars to his eyes.

"A big walrus! What huge tusks. I want that head and tusks as a souvenir, Alitet. We must kill him."

"That is a rapacious walrus. When he was a little one and rode on his mother's back she must have been killed and he was left alone. Such a walrus drives all the seals from the coast. We shall soon kill him."

The whaleboat crept noiselessly up to the sleeping beast. Tumatuge laid down his oar, picked up his rifle and crawled over to the bow. Alitet got ready a harpoon and an air bladder.

Ben watched the walrus with bated breath. This was his first experience of walrus hunting. But Ben knew that a walrus must not be killed outright—it would slide off the ice and sink. It had to be wounded first, harpooned and then shot dead with a bullet in the head. No doubt Tumatuge would now shoot it in the flippers or in the neck.

The oars propelled the whaleboat noiselessly through the water. The only sound was the dripping of the oars.

A shot rang out. The walrus raised its huge tusks, shook its head and plunged into the water before Alitet had time to throw his harpoon.

Everyone kept a tense lookout to warn the thrower on which side the walrus would float up. It did not appear on the surface for a long time.

Suddenly a terrific blow shook the whaleboat's bottom. Three planks were sent flying overboard and the huge tusks of the beast appeared for a second in the hole. The water rushed in. With a shout the men threw themselves upon the hole and began hastily stuffing it up with

their parkas. The next instant the head of the walrus rose along the side. It spurted blood and snarled with closed eyes. It hooked its tusks onto the side as though heaving itself onto an ice floe. Tumatuge fired point-blank and in the same instant the whaleboat capsized beneath the weight of the huge body.

Mr Thompson, snorting like a walrus, struck out for the nearest ice floe. He quickly swam to it and clutching the edge clambered on the ice, pale and dripping, minus his spectacles and with broken fingernails.

"My God!" he gasped, staring frantically about him. "Ben! Ben!"

Thompson shivered and gazed hard in the direction where the whaleboat had gone down. His whole life flashed before him in a single second.

"My God!" He cried again and dropped on the ice.

Alitet's head appeared on the surface of the water bobbing up and down like a corkfloat. He was clutching the air bladder and seemed to be standing neck-high in the water.

Alitet clambered onto another ice floe and began swiftly taking off his clothes.

"Charlie! Undress yourself, shake your clothes out! It will be bad if you don't!" shouted Alitet.

Mr. Thompson with chattering teeth kept repeating: "My God! My God!"

"Throw off your cloth shirts—they will take a long time drying!" shouted Alitet. He stood naked in his torbazes, shaking out his fur clothes vigorously.

Meanwhile the ice floes on which the two men stood drifted slowly apart. Alitet stretched his parka out with both hands, trying to use it as a sail, but there was no wind. The sea currents carried the ice floes farther and farther apart.

A barrel of fresh water was floating near the ice floe. Alitet shouted:

"Look, Charlie—there's a barrel of water! Watch it!"
The barrel floated close up.
Some fur bales floated past.
By midday Alitet's ice floe had sailed out of sight.
Mr. Thompson shivered with cold. Towards evening he ran a high fever. He was tormented by thirst. He put a piece of ice in his mouth but immediately spat it out. The sickening sweet-salt taste brought on an attack of nausea. Mr. Thompson, utterly spent, pressed a lump of ice to his forehead.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Los was confined to his room in the Revcom. He hobbled on a crutch from his bed to the table and back. Andrei Zhukov was a solicitous nurse.

Since their return to the coast after the cliff accident accompanied by Yarak, Aye and Mary, the latter had been taken into the employ of the Revcom as charwoman. Mary kept the place in perfect order, coming in the morning and leaving late in the evening. Her duties were not many and most of the time she was able to devote to studying Russian and learning to read and write.

Confined as he was to the house Los gladly undertook the duty of teacher. He would usually lie on his bed while Mary squatted on the floor on reindeer skins, spreading her paper on the bench and assiduously tracing out curlicues of the alphabet for all the world as though she were embroidering leather with reindeer wool.

"Fine, Mary!" Los said encouragingly. "If you go on the way you're doing you'll soon learn the whole bag of tricks."

Mary smiled and went on with her labours.

"Mary! Didn't your father ever try to teach you to read and write?"

"No. He said only white people needed to know it. And I am only half white."

Los was nonplussed.

"Yes, but aren't you his daughter?"

Mary was silent.

"Your father will probably go away to America this summer."

"I don't care," Mary answered indifferently.

"Wouldn't you like to go with him?"

"No. I will never leave Yarak. We are going to have a little child. We shall live here. Let Charlie go."

Mary got up and went over to the stove. Her soft embroidered torbazes made no sound. Long black braids hung down her back, swaying as she walked. Her calico dress clung to her waist. Los thought of Natasha and imagined her here, moving about the room and looking after things as Mary was now doing. She would probably come out with the first steamer. "I don't suppose she'll recognize me, in this awful beard..." he thought.

"Mary, give me the mirror, please."

Los took a look at himself and then asked for the scissors. He clipped the beard off and tossed it onto the floor.

Mary stood gaping in amazement.

"Los! What are you doing?" she gasped.

Los smiled, threw Mary a sly nod and got out his razor and soap.

"You want to make your face clean?" asked Mary.

"Yes."

"I know how to do it. Charlie used to make me do it. Let me help you!"

Mary shaved him.

"Why, Los, you have become a boy! And you are not at all terrible any more. People will no longer fear you!" And Mary went into a peal of merry laughter.

"But I do not want people to be afraid of me, Mary.



Here, my gums and legs are beginning to swell—that's no good. Not enough exercise. I'm afraid I'll fall ill with scurvy."

"You should eat raw seal's meat," said Mary.

Old Ilyich, ex-Umkatagen, entered the room.

"Where is Los?" he asked Mary.

"There he is," she said, pointing to the bed.

The old man surveyed Los, then turned to Mary and said in a tone of admonition:

"I am not so young to be played jokes with. I have come on important business. If your youth needs levity seek yourself a younger man, Mary."

"But I am not joking, Ilyich, it is the truth," said Mary, taken aback.

Los, assuming an air of gravity, put in:

"Mary speaks the truth, Ilyich. I am Los. You did not recognize me because I cut my beard off."

The old man looked at him closely.

"I think you are Los," he said at length.

The old man decided that Los had done very wisely in changing his appearance and throwing the evil spirits off the scent while he was ill. The most crafty spirits would now be baffled and mix him up with someone else.

The old man sat down on the edge of the stool and brought out a chunk of seal meat from a bag, saying:

"I have heard that your legs are swelling. You must eat this meat. I shall bring some more after the next hunt."

Los was deeply moved. Tears suddenly started to his eyes.

"Thanks, Ilyich!" he said. The old man departed.

"Now that is what I call a real noble character!" cried Los.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

There was a great stir and bustle on the beach. Harpoons, air bladders, rifles and casks of fresh water were being stowed away in the boats. The air rang with shouts and cries. Men were hastening to the hunt.

Ilyich was already sitting in the bow of his boat and the hunters were jumping in. They were his son Ermen, Yarak, Aye and four other lads. The old man was smiling. So he might. For this was a rare crew of sturdy youngsters! They needed no wind to speed on this boat.

Yarak and Aye, glad to be back on the coast, seized the oars eagerly. This was real life! Not like running after reindeer in the hills.

"But where's Andrei?" asked the old man

"There he comes with the primus stove," said Ermen.

The hunters liked to have Zhukov with them. He helped them in various ways, carrying things and dragging the boat ashore, but they liked him most of all for his stories. Despite his youth Andrei could, in the opinion of the hunters, vie in storytelling with the oldest of the sages. He had an inexhaustible fund of interesting tales. The hunters were particularly delighted with his stories about the Russian doctors who cut open the stomach of a living man, messed about inside it as though it were the belly of a walrus, "cut out" the illnesses, then sewed the stomach up with a needle and the man would walk about again as though nothing had happened.

It was a farfetched tale, of course, but still it was very interesting.

Andrei leapt into the boat and it immediately shoved off. Soon the oarsmen had thrown off their garments and, half naked, bent to the oars with might and main. The oars creaked in the rowlocks and the old man at the rudder cried from time to time:

"Aha-ha! Aha-ha!"

And the boat would shoot forward over the smooth surface. The other boats had been left far behind.

Ilyich kept a keen lookout in front of him. The hunters had full confidence in their helmsman, for they knew that their efforts would not be wasted. The old man was sure to bring them to the walruses.

The boat entered among the ice floes. The old man called a stop and told the hunters to get out onto the ice and have a look around. A little distance aside they noticed something yellow on an ice floe. They reported it to the old man and the boat immediately pulled out in that direction.

The old man clambered out onto the ice floe, carefully examined it, and said:

"Walruses have been lying here. They were here yesterday. Two walruses—a male and a female."

At noon the boat came upon the walruses. Two large beasts lay peacefully dozing on an ice floe.

A shot rang out followed by a swift throw of the harpoon, and the walrus disappeared into the water dragging the bladder float after it.

Soon the beast, wounded in the neck where the gills are situated, floated to the surface, staining the water crimson.

Three shots rang out in quick succession. The walrus hung limp on the bladder.

"Done for!" shouted the old man.

The hunters dragged the carcass onto the ice, and with faces glowing with excitement, began sharpening their knives on whetstones.

"Andrei, while they are dressing the walrus, you get the primus going. We shall drink tea," said Ilyich.

The walrus was dressed before the kettle had time to boil. The hunters stowed the meat away in the boat, washed their hands and sat down to their tea, highly pleased with their lucky start.

"Drink quickly!" said the old man. "We must look for the other walrus, the male—it cannot be far."

And once more the rowlocks creaked.

"Yarak, ship your oar and keep a lookout. Your eyes are younger," commanded the old man.

The boat tacked amid the ice floes and went farther and farther out to sea. Evening was drawing on.

"A walrus, a walrus!" cried Yarak.

Aye and Erniien seized their rifles and went over to the bow. Andrei examined the quarry through his binoculars. Just as the hunters were preparing to shoot, Andrei exclaimed:

"Stop! It's a man!"

The hunters lowered their rifles, the oarsmen their oars.

On the ice floe lay Mr. Thompson. His face burned and his breath came in gasps. He opened his eyes and tried to sit up, but his strength failed him.

"Drink," he whispered.

Andrei took his hand and felt his pulse.

"All drowned," said Mr. Thompson. "All over."

Charles Thompson was put into dry clothes and carried into the boat. He was delirious.

The boat sped on swiftly. Mr. Thompson lay motionless on the pile of walrus meat covered with skins.

Andrei touched his forehead, put his ear to his chest, then straightening up he said:

"He is dead. . . . Make for the shore."

The hunters did not stir. Old Ilyich too sat silent. It was no place for a dead body in a boat. It must be lowered into the sea.

"Ilyich! Charlie was a white man. He must be taken ashore. Nothing bad will come of it. Let us be moving," insisted Andrei.

And the old man put his hand to the rudder.

The news of Charlie's death spread quickly throughout the settlement. The people crowded on the beach. Mary gazed in silence at the body of the man who had been her father. She recollected how Charlie had dragged Yarak out by the leg cursing. And now he lay there with a bloodless face and without the pieces of glass over his eyes. A sudden feeling of terror swept over her. Going up to Ilyich she said:

"He must be buried at once."

"He cannot be laid in our burial grounds. He must be taken to Loren, the place where he lived," said the old man.

When the body of Mr. Thompson was brought back to the place where he had lived for over twenty years Rultyna ran out to the beach.

"Yarak, where is Ben?" she cried without a glance at Charlie.

"He was drowned. They all drowned."

Rultyna sank on the beach. Her legs gave way under her.

"Mary, we must sew him a new parka and carry him to the burial ground, to the rocks," said Rultyna apathetically.

"Rultyna, let Sime bury him in their own way, in the Merican way. We should not take him to our burial ground. Charlie was not a real man," said Mary sadly.



B O O K T W O



PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEVER-setting sun lingered in the cloudless, blue-black sky, bathing the coast and the dark-green vastness of the ocean in a bright light. There was not a single floe on the sea, not a cloudlet in the sky. One would think the sun found it dull roaming the celestial spaces all alone.

New-fledged grass sprouted in the dells, studded with flowers that had sprung up as soon as the snow disappeared. Not even the wild creatures trampled them. They skirted the variegated carpet along its margin.

The slender-stemmed red and blue and yellow flowers seemed to have their tender transparent petals attuned to the currents of warm air. They stood as if warily watching the sun, and as soon as it sank to the horizon and the air cooled, they quickly closed their petals.

And then in the dells the carpet of many colours instantly folded up and disappeared.

Near the yarangs the dogs lay dozing, occasionally opening a sleepy eye. They no longer hauled loaded sledges, but now lay on the sun-warmed shingle all day

long; they lay sprawled out, not rolled up in a ball as in winter. They were storing up energy for the winter's work.

The sea, too, at that early hour seemed to be lazing. It barely licked the pebbled beach. The gentle swell caressed the pebbles.

Tygreña sat on the beach amusing her son Aivam by throwing pebbles into the sea. Today she, too, did not feel like sewing torbazes for the herdsmen.

She straightened her coloured cotton frock and smiled. A gleam came into her black eyes. Throwing her plaits over her shoulder with a careless gesture, she thought: "And how I disliked putting on this cloth dress!"

As she studied the flower patterns on the dress her thoughts came round to Alitet. The smile instantly faded from her face and gave place to a look of distress and fear. So does a flower fade upon feeling the cold breath of night.

Alitet had gone away for five days. But more than twenty days had passed and there was still no sign of him. After all, life was better when you did not see his scowling eyes.

Aivam had already learned to walk and to laugh in a ringing voice. He was dressed in a hooded parka of reindeer calfskin trimmed with wolverine, and pretty little torbazes embroidered with coloured reindeer hair. He gazed with curiosity at the sea, at his mother and everything around. Aivam, too, felt gay.

Tygreña sat admiring him, watching his every movement, every breath he took and every glance of his black eyes. And a great wave of happiness swept over her. On a sudden tender impulse she seized the little boy, lifted him high in the air and nuzzled her face into his, kissing her little Aivam.

She held him in her strong arms and said:

"Aivam, that is the seal! You will be a great hunter of the sea beast! I myself shall teach you skill. You will become a real man!"

Looking at the sea, that source of life, Tygrena was once more reminded of Alitet. "It is always like that," she thought with chagrin. "He is away from home yet he keeps creeping into my head."

Disquieting thoughts thronged in her mind, sweeping up one after another like sea waves. "He will come back again soon. It is good that he does not live long in the settlement—always on the trail. The small moon has become a big one, but he is ever travelling and travelling. Let him. I wish he does not come for ever so long."

It is wonderful in the North at this time of the year! The earth is so drenched with sunlight that it hurts the eyes. The sun sends its generous long shafts down to the earth to the delight of man. But even that does not seem enough—the moon now rises from behind the hills. Full and fiery-red it smiles to the sun.

Tygrena pointed to it and told her boy:

"Look, Aivam, the sun's wife has come out."

A bidarka came into view down the coast. Tygrena cried out in delight:

"Look, look, Aivam! A bidarka! That is Vaamcho sailing in it!"

The boat came along with a tall bare mast. A long thong was stretched from the mast top to the shore. Five dogs ran along the water's edge hauling the boat by the leather line. The bidarka swiftly skimmed the sea and bore down on the Enmakai settlement.

The boy driver, clad only in sealskin trousers, ran alongside the dogs. The sun played on his dark-brown body.

The bidarka drew close. Vaamcho leapt out of it straight into the water. Panting with eagerness to impart his extraordinary news, Vaamcho rushed up to Tyg-

rena. His face was excited, and though he had not plied the oars on the boat there were cold beads of sweat on his neck. He sat down in silence at Tygrena's feet and, gazing at the sea, said quietly:

"Tygrena, I bring bad news. I heard it in the neighbouring settlement."

"What news is it, Vaamcho?" she asked in alarm.

"A rapacious walrus sunk Alitet's whaleboat. Everyone is lost. All the men are lost. Many of our hunters are lost."

Tygrena's face changed colour. "Drowned?" she asked fearfully. "Everybody?"

"All drowned. Only Charlie Red Nose crawled out on a floe. They found him dying. Alitet too is drowned."

Joy and grief mingled in Tygrena's heart. Her legs trembled and she had to sit down. She sat in silence, clutching her son to her breast. Vaamcho was silent too. The men dragged the bidarka out onto the beach.

Tygrena looked tenderly at her son.

"Aivam, I think life is going to change for us now," she whispered.

A momentary spark of happiness lit up her face. Nobody would compel her to live in Enmakai now. Alitet was no more. Again a look of sadness overspread her face. How many women had lost their husbands all at once! The wives of Tumatuge and Apa and Keinin and Valhircyn, and Gyrgol, who had just got married. "What a pity!" Tygrena thought sadly.

She sat on for a long time in silence, and Vaamcho did not interrupt her thoughts. Even Aivam grew quiet; he could not understand why his mother did not laugh. Tygrena got up impulsively and took her son by the hand.

"Vaamcho," she said with decision. "I am going away from Enmakai tomorrow. I shall go to seek Aye. I shall live beside him now."

"Tygrena, he is living in a settlement with the Russians. He has left the nomads."

"It does not matter. If it is true that they have become his friends I shall embroider the finest torbazes for those Russians. I shall hunt still better. We shall have much meat. We shall have many children."

"Tygrena, I shall take you down in my bidarka. I shall harness ten dogs and we shall travel swiftly, like the spring ducks. I shall drive the dogs myself—you know how fast I run!"

"You are good, Vaamcho. You are very good. You are a real man, Vaamcho! Aivam will be like you too. Aye will be very fond of him. I know."

Women came running down to the shore. They listened with dilated eyes to what Vaamcho had to say. Their faces grew stony. But not a single sigh did the sun hear, not a single tear did the moon see.

CHAPTER TWO

The Revcom men were still asleep when the silence of their room was shattered by the hoarse, protracted wail of a ship's siren. It awoke the sleeping northern echoes, and the whole settlement was astir in an instant.

Los, the Revcom representative, and his secretary Andrei Zhukov leapt out of bed and stood listening to the sound, staring at each other with a grin.

The door was flung open and Aye burst into the room. He said excitedly, in a low voice:

"A steamer. It is making for shore."

After Los and Zhukov had fallen over the precipice during Alitet's attempt on their lives and Aye had helped them out of the tundra, Aye had come to the Revcom with them and was preparing himself to go to the Main-

land. Feeling the friendly disposition of the Russian chiefs towards him, Aye bore himself with an air of importance and even seemed to have matured in years. His little black moustache had grown thicker, and his face no longer wore that harassed look. He was proud of the fact that he was to embark on a long journey, which not every man would dare to undertake. When he saw the steamer, however, Aye was assailed by qualms.



"Maybe I should not go away to the Mainland?" he whispered in a pleading voice.

Aye uttered this so softly that neither Los nor Andrei, both preoccupied with their own thoughts, heard him.

Andrei dashed to the window, tore off the curtain and suddenly began to cut capers, yelling:

"It's the *Soviet*! The *Soviet's* arrived!"

"A bit late with that news, old chap. I recognized it by its siren," Los said, swiftly buttoning his tunic. Then he, too, suddenly broke into a dance.

The floor and walls of the little house rocked and trembled.

Aye alone stood motionless, not knowing whether to rejoice or to be sad. That steamer was going to take him far, far away, to the unknown country of Russia. What would happen to him there?

The clanking of the anchor chain broke the morning stillness and startled the echoes of the shore. The grating noise of the metal sounded sweet music to Los' and Zhukov's ears.

The hunters, amid noisy excitement, launched a bidarka.

Los threw himself onto the oars with such zest that they bent and creaked.

"Aha-ha-ha! Aha-ha-ha!" the helmsman, old Ilyich, kept shouting, and the bidarka sped towards the steamer.

A crowd of people was gathered on the deck of the *Soviet*. They gazed with curiosity at the approaching bidarka and exchanged remarks in animated voices. They had never seen a boat with sides that let light through. The yellowish walrus hide, cleaned of fur, was translucent, and the bidarka seemed such a frivolous construction that the passengers on the steamer were amazed how anyone could venture out to sea in it. Yet this same bidarka could support three walrus carcasses.

An authoritative voice boomed from the captain's bridge:

"Hello, Comrade Los!"

Los recognized the voice as belonging to Captain Mikhail Petrovich Lyadov, who had set him ashore on this Chukotsk coast the previous navigation season.

Los waved his cap in response to the greeting while he closely scanned the faces of the people on deck, hoping to find his wife among them. Apparently she had not come. She would have been the first to shout a greeting to him.

"Lower the main ladder!" the captain commanded ceremoniously.

When he stepped on deck Los stamped his foot in joy, as though he felt his native soil under him.

"Comrade Los, the captain asks you to step into his cabin," the young navigation officer said. "He'll be down from the bridge in a minute."

The steward, who had learned his captain's habits to perfection, had already set the table in the cabin and laid out refreshments on the snow-white cloth. This was a duty which he performed almost mechanically, as soon as his ears caught the rattle of the anchor chain.

The steward liked important guests. Los, however, in his shabby army tunic and khaki trousers stuffed into none too handsome sealskin torbazes, did not impress him as belonging to that category.

Everything in the captain's cabin was spick and span. Los felt a trifle disconcerted in the unaccustomed surroundings. He looked about him irresolutely and under the stern eye of the steward deposited himself gingerly into an armchair, then got up, surveyed the white linen cover, and, plucking up courage, reseated himself.

"It's nice and clean here," he remarked to the steward. There was admiration in his voice.

"We live on the water," the latter replied. Then he came up to Los and added sternly, "That's the captain's chair. Move over to the sofa."

Los obediently moved over. The steward flicked his napkin at the seat of the armchair.

The captain came in smiling, wrung Los' hand and said cordially:

"Well, Robinson, we'll have to wet this meeting. I've got some cognac, let me tell you—nectar for the gods! What are you walking with a stick for?"

"I broke my leg, Mikhail Petrovich. But the bone has knitted now."

"That gives us another excuse to drink to your health," the bluff captain said, drawing the bottle to

wards him. "You just look what you're going to drink! Stars on the bottle as thick as Orion!" the captain exclaimed.

"D'you happen to have any potatoes on board, Mikhail Petrovich? I haven't seen 'em for a whole year."

"Mitrich, get us some of that precious fruit," the captain said, addressing the steward.

All this while Los was thinking about his wife, but the captain said not a word about her.

The old friends clinked their glasses and drained them. The captain wiped his grey moustache with a napkin.

"Well, how d'you find it?" he asked with a sly wink.

"Fine, but the snacks are still better!" Los muttered, attacking the fried potatoes.

They drank to the arrival of the steamer, and drank again to fair weather.

"What's the news on the Mainland, Mikhail Petrovich? Have you brought any newspapers?"

"I've brought you them all. For the whole year. You'll be able to read the old papers like a novel. I had the deuce of a time collecting a complete set. Where can you get 'em, old newspapers? Took 'em out of the Gubernia Revcom files. Well, I've brought out some people for you too."

"Who's that?"

Again Los' thoughts flashed to his wife, but the captain went on:

"Three schoolteachers, a Red Cross medical crew—five of 'em. Quite a crowd, you see! This country's never seen such specialists in all its born days."

"Fine!" Los exclaimed in delight.

"Six Revcom workers, too, and one militiaman."

"We could do with more militiamen. There's smuggling going on here."

"This militiaman is worth twenty. A whopping fellow, with a moustache bigger than mine. A demobilized Red Army man from Barnaul. Funny chap he is. Comes up to me once on the bridge, looks at the navigation instruments and my chart and asks, 'Is it hard to learn this here captain's job?' 'A bit harder than the militiaman's,' I say. 'Go on,' he says, 'the militia's the most important job going. Guardians of law and order.' He certainly is proud of the service!"

The captain paused.

"Well, and I've brought out some men for the fur trading stations. The North Company's 'busted,' you know. The agreement's been cancelled and it's going into liquidation. A new Soviet company has been formed, the Okhotsk-Kamchatka Fishing Co.—OKARO for short. What a name to think up! Sounds like regular Japanese! Well, this OKARO will look after the fur trade too. It's ta-ta to the North Co.!"

This news astonished Los. He and Andrei had thought that Moscow could not know the situation on the spot, and yet the people there had come to the correct decision. It even piqued him that this decision had been taken without his having had a say in the matter as the Revcom representative. Los sighed.

"We came to the same conclusion ourselves—I mean about liquidation of the North Company," he said. "But our mail, damn it, is still lying in the cupboard. There's communication service for you! If we had proper communications our ideas would have hit the nail right on the head..."

"So Moscow anticipated your ideas?" the captain said with a smile.

"That's just the amazing part of it! Moscow is so far away, yet it senses what's got to be done out here. It's the proper decision. We can do without the Americans.

We've made the Revolution, so I guess we'll manage somehow to learn how to trade."

"You've said it!" boomed the captain. "A regular offensive has been launched in the country, all along the economic front. And would you believe it, an Archangel skipper told me that while the Civil War was still going on, Lenin gave instructions to unearth data about the Ukhta oil deposits in the North. That's a man for you! By the way, I've brought you a geologist as well, to start with. He's going to nose out what's in these hills. I'm proud of young Russia, mighty proud!"

"Yes, there's work here for geologists," Los said, remembering the odd behaviour of his compass needle in the hills.

The captain took another sip of cognac and went on:

"You know, right after the Revolution I was on the go all the time. Out in the Far East, you remember, there was such a merry-go-round of governments that it made me sick to my stomach. I had a good look at it and then—anchor aweigh and off I took the ship. This same one! I served on a Chinese line. Like a cabby—a man without a country! Then the Soviet power came and I headed back for Vladivostok. Painted over the ship's old name and christened her the *Soviet*..."

Los listened smiling. The captain had told him all this the year before.

"I've brought you a radio outfit and an operator so you shouldn't feel lonely out here."

"You don't say so!" Los cried, overjoyed. "Well, Mikhail Petrovich, we'll have to toast the radio with some more of that heavenly stuff of yours."

"A fellow has to be a darned windlass not to drink a toast like that," the captain said, refilling the glasses. "Yes—I've got a letter for you—been carrying it about since the last navigation. I didn't get round to you that time on my way back from Kolyma. I brought it to

Vladivostok. Carried it home with me, then to Shanghai, Nagasaki and Dairen. Anyway, I've delivered it now. D'you remember Tolstukhin? It's from him. . . . And here's another one"—the captain winked gaily—"from your wife. But I warn you, you're not going to read it in my cabin. Who knows what she's written you there? Maybe she's called me all sorts of names and you won't want to hold up a glass with me when you've read it."

Los recognized his wife's handwriting on the envelope and took the letter with great agitation. He wanted to read it in private himself, think over it and recapture those memories of lost youth when he was an engine driver and she a schoolteacher. It was to her he owed his education. Los carefully put the letter in his wallet.

"Did you see her, Mikhail Petrovich?"

"Yes. Just before we sailed from Vladivostok a woman came running in. All excited, you know, eyes sparkling, and started shooting questions at me right off: 'Have you been working on the *Soviet* all the time, Comrade Captain?' 'Yes,' says I, 'I've been sailing on the *Soviet* all the time.' She thinks a ship's the Revcom or a factory! 'And I sailed on her last year too.' She asked me whether I knew Los. 'You bet I do!' says I. 'We went together forty days last navigation.' 'Where did you go?' Ha-ha-ha! She thinks you can't go on a ship, you can only ride. Well, she asked all about you and where you were. Wanted to join you. I talked her out of it, yes, I did. Told her the whole truth. 'I set Los ashore on a deserted coast,' says I. 'What's happened to him now I can't tell you.' I advised her not to weigh anchor, sure, I did. . . ."

"I guess you did the right thing, Mikhail Petrovich," Los said dubitatively.

"Sure I did, don't I know the country? Now, when you get settled down and build a house, then she can go ahead and hoist sail. That's what I told her. . . . She's

awfully keen, though, to join you! Not like our skippers' wives. They've got used to living without their husbands, the hussies! . . . Well, let's have another drink. . . . Mitrich, more potatoes!" the captain commanded, reaching out for the olives and candied lemon.

"How's life on the Mainland, Mikhail Petrovich?"

"Life's running on the course set by Lenin. Comrade Stalin's at the helm, and the ship's standing on a straight course. Sailing along despite all the reefs. Naturally, there're troublemakers who want to turn the ship off her course. Well, they're gradually being put ashore. Can't be otherwise. It's like on this ship of mine: if you let the crew get out of hand you'll find yourself heading straight for the bottom to feed the fishes."

There was a rattle of winches. The deck and ship's holds rang with joyful noise. "Yo-heave-ho! yoho!" could be heard through the porthole of the captain's cabin.

"I've brought you a twenty-room house. Three school-houses. You'll live like the prince of Monaco now."

Los shook his head meditatively.

"Not enough, Mikhail Petrovich. Three schools. . . . You know the size of the coast. A bit bigger than the state of Monaco, I should say!"

"My dear chap, d'you think the *Soviet* is made of rubber? This isn't bad for a start. Moscow wasn't built in a day either."

The captain yelled:

"Mitrich, tell the first mate I want to see him!"

The first mate came in.

"Look here, Ivan Ivanovich," the captain said, "get all hands out on assembling the Revcom house. I give you forty-eight hours for the job."

"Very good, Mikhail Petrovich!"

"As soon as the Revcom chimneys begin smoking we weigh anchor. . . . Where d'you want the schoolhouses shipped?" This question was addressed to Los.

"One here, another to the southern part of the district, and the third to Enmakai."

"H'm. . . . Enmakai? That's three hundred odd miles through the ice fields."

"We need one there, Mikhail Petrovich, need it badly!"

The captain stood musing. He lit his pipe in silence, then finally said with decision:

"All right, Nikita Sergeyevich! I'll risk it. . . ." He brought his fist down on the table and exclaimed ecstatically: "This Russia is after my liking! Sending a whole big ship into the ice to deliver one little school-house." The captain waved his arm. "The world's never seen such great humanism!"

"How could it be otherwise, Mikhail Petrovich? It's all part of our everyday work."

They went out on deck. Andrei Zhukov came running up.

"Whaleboats!" he cried excitedly. "Twelve whaleboats, Nikita Sergeyevich!"

"Whaleboats?" Los queried in astonishment.

"Yes, I brought 'em," the captain said. "The Northern Committee called me out for consultation. It was my recommendation!"

"I don't know how to thank you, Mikhail Petrovich!" Los lifted his chin and passed his hand across his throat, saying, "That's how badly we need 'em here."

CHAPTER THREE

The newly-arrived personnel crowded into the little Revcom house, waiting for Los.

Doctor Pyotr Petrovich, a man of about forty with a broad good-natured face, stood before a rough hand-drawn map of the Chukotsk Peninsula talking with the geologist Dyagilev.

"Look at this, Vladimir Nikolayevich. It's probably the latest revised and enlarged publication of the Los cartographical office," he said ironically to the geologist, pointing to the map on the wall.

Dyagilev, a tall lean man with an energetic face, pulled a printed map out of his case, compared it with Los' and said in surprise:



"I must say it's fuller and better than mine. Look, Pyotr Petrovich, mine is a totally blank patch here. Just the coastline, and even that's not exact. Los' map has even got the bays and capes marked on it."

The geologist became engrossed in a study of the Revcom map.

Three young men were examining Los' copybook dictionary of Chukchi words and phrases with great interest. They were the schoolteachers Nikolai Dvorkin, Kuzma Dozorny and Mikhail Skorikov. They were struck by the grammatical construction of numerals in the Chukchi language.

"Look, fellows, this is a very interesting system of wordbuilding!" Skorikov said. "If you ask me, their system of numeration is based on the scale of fives and not on tens."

"It can't be," Dvorkin said. "Look—*innen* stands for one, *myngitken* ten, *myngitken innen parol* eleven. It's clearly based on tens."

"But you look further!" Skorikov remonstrated warmly. "*Kilhinken* is fifteen, *kilhunken innen parol* sixteen. What does that prove?"

"I also think it's based on fives," Kuzma Dozorny threw in.

A heated argument ensued.

The Revcom accountant Prygunov sat apart in a cor-

ner in moody silence. His slightly puffy face wore a scowl, and he seemed to be thinking, "Well, fellows, we've landed in some hole! Hanged if I can see any sense in arguing over every silly thing!"

The militiaman Khokhlov was battling with pencil and paper, composing something on his leather case which rested on his knees.

"What are you puffing there, like a grampus?" the accountant growled.

"I'm writing up a complaint against you, so you shouldn't mope out here," Khokhlov shot back.

All these men, who had arrived here from various parts of Russia, had become well acquainted with one another en route and had whiled away their long period of enforced idleness by mutual banter. The principal victim of this chaff was Prygunov, who had gone North to fill his purse.

The managers of the fur-trading posts came into the room—the red merchants, as they had been dubbed during the journey—Rusakov and Zhohov.

Zhohov stopped in the doorway, surveyed the room and threw out sarcastically:

"So this is the Chukotsk Palace of Soviets?"

Prygunov burst out laughing.

"Mind you don't laugh out of the wrong side of your face!" the militiaman said severely. "You'll be glad of this palace yet! If they don't manage to get the big house up you'll sit in the loft operating your abacus."

Los came in accompanied by the Revcom instructor Osipov.

"Here we are, Comrade Los, practically the whole crowd," Osipov said.

Thickset and short of stature, Osipov looked older than his forty years. He had been sent here by the Party as a man who knew motors.

Los shook hands with the arrivals and asked:

"Who of you are Party members?"

"I am," answered Rusakov, the trading-post manager.

"The teachers are all Komsomol members," Osipov threw in. "They can all be admitted to the Party. Molodtsov, the radioman, is a Komsomol member too."

"Which of you is the radio operator?"

"There he is, talk of the devil," Osipov said, introducing Molodtsov who had just come running in.

Los greeted him delightedly, as the dearest of guests. "How d'you do, Comrade Molodtsov! Have a look at your premises. We'll fix the radio station up in here."

"Not much of a place," the operator muttered, running his eye over the room with a look of disappointment.

"It's not the way a house is built that makes it a fine house but how they feed you in it," said Los. "It'll be a fine radio station." Then he addressed the rest of the company. "You see how crowded we've been living, comrades. I can't even offer you seats. But I shan't keep you long. The point is this—the new Revcom house and the school have to be assembled at all costs while the steamer is berthed here. The captain is giving me the whole ship's crew besides the building gang. We shall all have to lend a hand on this emergency job. I'd ask you please to do your best. We'll have plenty of time to sleep it off. The nights will be long here."

"Don't you worry, Comrade Los, we'll put our shoulder to it," the doctor said. "We've been selected as able-bodied men fit for any kind of work."

"Fine! You, Osipov, will take charge of timber deliveries to the building sites. The doctor will superintend brick and clay deliveries—the stove-setting job, in short. We'll have to arrange a living conveyor from the beach. The local youngsters will form a chain and pass down the bricks out of the boat from hand to hand. I'll help you later on, Comrade Doctor, in organizing this job. Bear in mind, it's a very important part of the building

job. If we don't get the chimneys up while the steamer's here, we're done for—we haven't got anyone who can set stoves."

"Why, Comrade Revcom Representative, I'll lay you stoves that'll stand a hundred years! With wire binding!" said the militiaman.

"You get ready to leave for the northern part of the coast. This very minute. A bidarka is going that way, it'll drop you there. You will land at Spring Cove. Your job's to fight smuggling. Comrade Zhukov will tell you all about it."

"I'm ready, Comrade Revcom Representative. Just hoist my suitcase under my arm, and there I am. We're military fellows," the militiaman answered blithely.

"I release Comrade Zhukov from this emergency job. He's going back to the Mainland on the *Soviet*. Let him get ready. We'll have to release another man, too. A teacher must go right away to the Enmakai settlement. Shaman influence is very strong there. He'll choose a suitable site for the school and get the population prepared so that when the steamer calls there they can start assembling the schoolhouse without losing a minute's time. The captain is taking a risk, we can't hold the steamer up. There won't be many pupils there, probably eight at most. Who of you teachers wants to go there? I warn you, it isn't an easy place."

"Any of us will go," said Kuzma Dozorny, a frail-looking lad. "We're all Komsomol members, and we knew where we're going."

"Isn't there a teacher bigger than you?" asked Los.

Dvorkin, a tall, well-built young man with a slightly pock-marked face, got up.

"Will this one do?" he asked with a shy smile.

"He will! You will get your instructions from Comrade Zhukov. Well, that's about all. Now get to your places, comrades, and start work at once."

"One minute," said the geologist. "I've got nothing against this emergency job, Comrade Los, but seeing that mine's chiefly a summertime occupation I shouldn't like to lose time. Don't you think I ought to sling my knapsack on my back, take my hammer and make off for the hills?"

"All right," acquiesced Los. "But you'll have to take a guide with you."

CHAPTER FOUR

The *Soviet* rode at anchor in the roadstead, her funnels smoking faintly. The air was rent by the clatter of winches. A motorboat scurried back and forth between steamer and beach towing a string of smaller boats.

On the beach, not far from the old Revcom house, the dovetail timbers of the new building were being stacked straight on the shingle.

There was a merry ringing of axes and rasping of saws. From all sides came the sound of loud voices. Logs, boards and assembled frames came up from the boats in a steady flow.

The schoolteacher Dvorkin and the militiaman Khokhlov were already sitting in a bidarka.

"Andrei!" Los cried. "Give the teacher some of my copybooks with the words and phrases. I've got six sets of them in there."

"Shall I give the militiaman one?"

"Give him one too."

"Err..en," Andrei said to the helmsman, "give this paper to Vaamcho and tell him we're sending it in place of the one he burned over the bonfire. Tell him we consider him the chairman of the Enmakai Tribal Soviet just the same. Please explain to him that the shaman

Korauge simply tried to scare him out of it that time. D'you understand? You're a chairman yourself."

Ermen nodded and put the paper away next to his skin. The bidarka pushed off. It spread sail and headed with the wind down past the building site.

A carpenter sitting astride a log wall shouted:

"Comrades, one minute's silence! The militia is passing!"

The men waved their greetings, one with an axe, another with a saw, a third with a plank.

The militiaman stood up on the gunwale and fired three rifle shots into the air by way of salute.

The bidarka laid a course northwest.

The house shot up as though by magic. The stoves took shape at the same time as the walls. The carpenters hurried to finish ahead of the stove setters, and the stove setters strove to outdo the carpenters. Work hummed. The brief northern summer spurred everybody on.

Egorich the stove setter, a white-aproned man with a flowing beard, worked with might and main. Laying on a brick, he shouted down gaily from the height of his stove:

"Well, boys, we're going to work till sundown!"

A laugh ran through the building site. Someone shouted back:

"We could build a whole town by the time the sun sets round here."

"Did you ever!" Egorich exclaimed in surprise. "Mind you, I'd heard that there were such countries where the sun never sets, but I didn't believe it—thought it was just talk."

Together with the women the hunters carried up unusual burdens. The youngsters stood with shining eyes as they passed the bricks up from hand to hand; they were having fun.

Old man Ilyich strutted round the building in dignified silence, picking his way carefully over logs and planks. He was hoping life on the coast would not be spoiled by all these goings on. Why had so many Tange come down here? Look how many there were! And how deftly they worked! You just look! And worked with a hearty good will too! Worked and laughed! They were probably all Los' kinsmen. They wouldn't be helping him if they weren't. What a lot of relatives he had! The old man caught sight of Los and went towards him.

"Ah, Ilyich! Good day! Sit down, let's have a smoke," Los said, bringing out a box of cigarettes.

"What is this building for?" the old man asked, pointing to the house.

"To live and work in. New men have come. They're going to help you build a new life. Look, whaleboats with motors have arrived. They'll go out after the walrus without oars. They're swift, like that motorboat over there."

"I don't know," the old man said doubtfully. He took a puff at his cigarette and started coughing.

Towards the close of the second day the captain of the *Soviet* came ashore. The house had risen to the roof, and the rafters were now being put into place.

"There, Mikhail Petrovich, the roof isn't ready yet, and we've already got one chimney smoking. We'll soon let you go. We'll fix the doors and frames ourselves," Los said as he greeted the captain.

"What for? We'll see it through to the end. I don't like to leave a job unfinished. The weather's fine, no signs of any storm brewing."

The sun sank almost to the sea. Then, as though afraid to plunge into the cold waters, the incandescent fiery-red ball suddenly began to rise in the heavens once more.

Soon its long slanting rays were playing on the galvanized roof of the new building. The glass in the big window frames glittered, attracting the attention of the residents. Los also stood admiring the new house.

"Now things'll hum!" he said meditatively. Then, remembering his wife, he thought, "Just the same, it's a pity the captain didn't bring her out here. Just look at that house! A regular mansion!"

Andrei came up. Los put his arm round him.

"I'll miss you, Andrei, my boy."

"Why, look at the crowd of people you've got now. All our own men, Soviet men."

"I've got used to you. . . . Now mind you don't get stranded out there. Be sure to come back! I'm sending you to push things on at the other end. See that you put everything through. A man in the flesh can do more than all our papers and reports. Most important of all, see that you get them to agree to have a culture services base built here. It was your idea. Here, sit down on this log. . . ."

They sat for a while in silence.

"The captain tells me that a Northern Committee's been set up in Moscow—under the Central Executive Committee itself. Go there. Push our problems everywhere. Understand, Andrei, my boy?"

"It's all clear, Nikita Sergeyevich."

"When you drop into the Loren settlement act as a representative of the Revcom. Help the Red Cross to establish itself there, and the school. Advise Mary to train as a nurse—I've spoken to the doctor about her already. He's a good fellow. . . . Engage Yarak as manager of the fur warehouse. We'll make him trading-post manager in time. Somehow I don't like that Zhohov man. . . . He's not one of us."

Andrei, his notebook on his knees, swiftly jotted down the orders and instructions.

"Now about Mr. Simons. He has to turn over the trading post and sail on the *Soviet* as far as Petropavlovsk. According to the liquidation contract the Americans are turning over all the merchandise to us at a forty per cent discount for salable and sixty per cent discount for unsalable goods. You realize what this is? Very large sums are involved. In foreign currency, too. Don't forget these things. They won't ship the merchandise back, it wouldn't pay them. That light ladies' underwear, for instance—who wants it? Who wears it here? That'll go down as unsalable. You can't depend on Zhohov—you can buy him body and breeches for twenty dollars."

"Nikita Sergeyevich, you ought to send the Revcom instructor."

"You'll do by yourself. Osipov will go to check up on the other trading post. That's that. And another thing—you needn't write this down. It's my personal request, I want you to do me a favour as a friend. Try and see Natasha in Vladivostok, and if her health permits, drag her out here. There's tons of work here, you can see yourself. Don't put her wind up with all kinds of scary stories. No need to. She'll come out here and see things for herself."

"I'll see to it all, Nikita Sergeyevich. You can depend upon me."

Los smiled, and putting an arm round Andrei, he said gently:

"I know, Andrei, old boy. . . . Now about Aye. What d'you think of doing with him?"

"I'll take him about with me. Let him see the world. This trip will be a university for him. He'll come back and tell people all about the Mainland himself. But I've got something else at the back of my mind. This is just between ourselves. Just imagine me coming to the Gubernia Revcom in the company of Aye, a real live

representative of his people! D'you see what an impression it'll make? They'll give you anything you ask for."

Los chuckled with satisfaction. "What a smart one you are, Andrei! It's a grand idea! When you get to Loren, and Zhukov unloads his goods, pick out a suit for Aye. And boots, linen and everything else. Understand? Rig him out properly."

The *Soviet* gave the departure signal. Everybody ran to the boat.

While Los and Zhukov were busy with shipping document formalities, Aye stood by the ship's rail gazing longingly at his native shores. He had had more than one impulse to dash down the ladder, jump into the hunter's bidarka and run away into the tundra. Perhaps Aye would have done so, had he not known that the steamer was going to make a call at Enmakai to unload the school building. He was very curious to see Tygrena and her little boy and to tease the shaman Korauge. "See what Aye has become! He is the master of the iron ship. I have come to take away Tygrena. She is my wife, betrothed to me in childhood."

Aye stood lost in thought. Los and Andrei came up to him.

"We're going to sail right away, Aye!" Andrei exclaimed joyfully.

"Yes, we're going to sail," Aye replied mournfully. His voice sounded as if he were about to lay his head on the block.

"Don't feel blue, Aye," Los consoled him. "Next year you'll return with Andrei. I'll come out to meet you." He pumped Aye's hand.

Then he embraced and kissed Andrei. To the clang of the anchor chain he descended the ladder to the bidarka. In spite of himself he felt sad.



CHAPTER FIVE

Alitet walked along the coast. His almost bare feet sank into the shingle of the beach. His fur stockings were in shreds, and two strips that barely covered his chest and back were all that remained of his parka. Nothing remained either of his walrus-hide belt, his torbazes or reindeer fur cap. All these and even the seal bladder Alitet had eaten to fight hunger on the drifting floes.

Ragged and utterly spent, he now walked on firm ground and threw glances about him. He thought of Charlie, who had climbed out onto a floe as he had done. Where was he now? And the whaleboat was lost. Ai, how sorry he was for the whaleboat! And the pelts! How many pelts!

After the wreck of the whaleboat Alitet did not drink water for two days. His lips grew parched and his throat contracted. The sea water and salty ice induced nausea.

It was not until the third day, when the floe on which he drifted was driven into an ice field, that he came upon a block of fresh water ice as he wandered amid the packs. It looked pale among the blue hummocks all around. Many years of winds and severe frosts had squeezed the salt out of it.

Upon catching sight of it from afar Alitet yelled like a madman and dashed towards it. He pulled his knife out as he ran, in order to chip off a piece of the ice. When he came to the hummock, however, he cast the knife aside, and throwing himself flat upon the ice began greedily crunching it with his teeth, paying no attention to the blood that oozed from his gashed lips.

Having slaked his agonizing thirst and chipped off a large chunk of ice for later use, he proceeded on his way, leaping across the crevasses and skirting the open patches of water. He made for the shore, crossing from one floe to another until he reached the margin of the ice

field. A broad strip of open sea separated him from the shore. He gazed hungrily at the familiar contours of the hills.

The sunbeams played on the ice. The molten orange orb of the sun beat down hotly. A dark shadow was cast by the hummocks and the solitary bergs, and that shadow deceived men, who might take it for a fathomless lane of open sea.

For a long time Alitet stood motionless, as though he himself had been transformed into a berg. His eyes were fixed on the summit of Rylkaliaut. How many times had he travelled around that hill on his dog team!

Alitet's legs began to tremble and he sat down. He gnashed his teeth. He felt sleepy, but he dare not fall asleep. His hands rose and clutched his head. He felt no pain and did not even notice that a tuft of hair came away in his hand.

A small floe, driven along by an undercurrent, moved past the margin of the ice field. Alitet suddenly grew alert at the sight of it. He leapt to his feet and ran down to the edge of the ice with bated breath. Bending over the sea he gazed longingly at the floe, then his eyes shifted with a look of hope to the heights of Ryrkaliaut. A nervous tremor ran through his body. Clutching the chunk of fresh-water ice, he mustered all his strength in a tremendous leap and landed on the floe. It lurched as he came down on it, and the dark green surface of the water was ruffled with widening circles. Alitet squatted on his haunches, drew in his neck and was afraid to stir.

A breeze sprang up and dashed the large beads of sweat from his face. Alitet bit off a piece of ice, swallowed it and undressed himself. He drew his trousers onto his arms, opened out the remnants of his parka, and holding all this high aloft used it as a sail to propel the floe. Hunger and a wild desire to make for the safety of the shore had driven him onto this dangerous floe. He

realized that if the wind freshened he would be washed off by the waves. Yet sheer blind terror had made him abandon the security of the ice field, where there was nothing to eat.

The wind blew in a steady current and the floe sailed along like a bidarka. Alitet stood naked, exposed to the scorching rays of the sun, which stood high in the sky, and he did not lower his arms once. The coast lured him on. The nearer it approached the shore the more slowly did the floe seem to be moving.

His arms grew numb. He could barely hold them up and stand on his legs. But he stood and gazed at the hills with unblinking eyes.

Only towards evening did the floe ground on shoals within reach of the shore. Alitet seemed to run amuck. He caught up his chunk of ice and jumped into the water. He crawled out onto the sun-baked shingle of the beach on all fours, like an animal, dropped down and fell asleep immediately.

The sun had dipped to the rim of the sky when Alitet awoke with a cold shiver. He opened his eyes. Next to him lay a tiny piece of fresh-water ice from which large drops dripped slowly. Alitet stared long and hard at this now useless piece of ice.

"It has melted," he whispered. Jumping up, he ran away from the sea.

He warmed himself by running over the soft tundra, which was carpeted with spring flowers. Coming to a small puddle, he threw himself down before it and lapped the water like a dog. Suddenly he saw a ghastly, hairy face in the muddy mirror of the water. He sprang to his feet and moved away from the puddle, gazing back at it over his shoulder with horror.

Soon he discovered a mouse hole. He scraped away the loose earth and took the hoard of food he found there—every single grain and edible root. But this he did

not eat. He tore off two leaves of wild sorrel, thrust them into his mouth and walked on again along the coast chewing them.

He made for Enmakai, steering clear of people. Those who caught sight of him from afar sheered off in fright, taking him for a wandering man, a terrak.*

Alitet was terribly emaciated. His face was haggard and hollow-eyed, his cheekbones stood out sharply and his beard had grown long and grey. In his tattered clothing he looked gruesome. He walked slowly, without swinging his arms; he could barely drag his feet along, but he did not stop. Now and again he would bend down to tear off a leaf of sorrel, then proceed on his way again. He walked until the sun became too hot. Then he turned off into a hollow, dropped onto the moss and fell into a sound sleep. He slept until the sun had made a wide circle. Awakened by the currents of cold air, he jumped to his feet, chewed some of the mouse food and started off again down the coast. He walked all night.

The glaring sun shone out again. Alitet clambered up a little hilltop. From afar he had already noticed a bidarka coming towards him. It moved swiftly, drawn on a long leather thong by a team of dogs running along the beach. In the movements of the driver's arms Alitet recognized Vaamcho. Peering intently at the bidarka he saw Tygrena sitting in the bow. Alitet crouched low like a wolf tracking its quarry, then scuttled down the hillside and hid.

When the dogs drew abreast of the little hill Alitet came out from his hiding place and seized the thong

* The coast Chukchi have a deep-rooted belief in the existence of terraks. These are men that have been carried off on floes while hunting. They go mad, their bodies become covered with hair and they lose the power of speech, but they acquire the capacity to endure unbelievable deprivations. The terraks fear people. Occasionally they sneak into settlements to steal meat and clothing, after which they run off into the ice fields again.—*Author's note.*

stretched to the mast of the bidarka. Vaamcho stood petrified. The people in the bidarka screamed. Alitet had risen out of the ground like a ghost.

Weak and exhausted as he was, Alitet could not hold the dogs. He fell, but he did not let go the thong and was dragged a short way along the pebbly beach until the team came to a halt.

"Come here!" Alitet cried to Vaamcho. These were his first words in many days.

Vaamcho did not budge.

"Don't be afraid. The spirits have helped me to escape. . . ."

Vaamcho continued to stare at Alitet with a fear-stunned look.

"Come here, you crazy man!" Alitet, sitting on the pebbles among the dogs, shouted.

Vaamcho's face was pale and his hands trembled. Mechanically he stepped up.

"Don't be afraid. I am hungry. I want to get home quickly. Pull in the bidarka."

Vaamcho clutched the thong convulsively and drew in the bidarka. He did not feel his hands move.

Alitet tumbled into the boat and dropped onto its soft bottom. He stretched out and lay gazing up at the sky.

Tygrena wished to turn her head away but she could not. She wanted to speak, but her tongue refused to obey her. She slipped down from the bow of the boat. She was seized with such terror that she dropped Aivam. She bit her lip until it bled, then caught up her son and clutched him to her breast.

"Turn the dogs back!" Alitet shouted.

The dogs ran back the way they had come. The helmsman was so terrified that he did not know on which side to put over the tiller. The bidarka now zigzagged over the shoals, now careened seaward with a heavy list and shipped a sea to port.

Alitet wiped the water from his face, turned over and crawled on all fours to the stern. He waved the helmsman away and took over the tiller. He sat motionless and silent, his sunken eyes dark and inscrutable. The people in the boat were afraid to look at him yet their eyes were drawn involuntarily in his direction. They were amazed that they still lived and did not die from terror.

The dogs ran homeward at a faster pace. They always did. Vaamcho raced after them as though carried on the wings of the wind. No one in the bidarka spoke a word.

Tygrena, her son clutched to her bosom, looked Alitet straight in the face. Their eyes met. She nerved herself and asked in a loud voice the sound of which gave her more courage:

"Who are you? A terrak?"

Alitet smiled grimly, but the smile instantly faded from his twisted lips. His grey beard quivered.

"You have forgotten who I am? You thought I perished?"

"So people said," Tygrena answered, this time quietly.

"No. I have not perished. It is I. I battled with the spirits of hunger for many days. They proved powerless against me. . . . Give me a drink!"

The hunter sitting next to the keg of water quickly filled a mug and passed it to him with trembling hands.

Alitet swallowed the mug in one gulp.

"More!" he said, holding out his hand.

After the second mug he touched his face and said:

"There was no food anywhere around. I came across only one seal on the floe. I crept up to it against the wind and seized it by the flipper, but it slipped out of my hand and dropped into the sea. My clothes served me as food."

Alitet's booming voice battered against the ears of the boat's occupants. Tygrena was seized with terror. She lost consciousness and slumped down on top of her son.

By the time Tygrena recovered, the bidarka had gone

a long way. Not seeing the boy by her side, she started to tremble: she thought Alitet had sacrificed him to the spirits of the sea. She looked around in alarm and found her son; he had crawled off to the side. Then she caught him up, throwing a malicious glance at Alitet.

Alitet sat in the stern. His appearance was just as fear-inspiring as before. He stared straight in front of him in silence, seemingly inanimate. Tygrena surveyed him through a tiny crack between her fingers. She knew that Alitet would now want to make a big thanksgiving sacrifice to the spirits, and for some reason or other she remembered the bearded Russian chief. A faint smile flashed in her face. Then, with a dull ache in her heart, the thought crept back into her mind. "What if Alitet says that Aivam must be offered as a sacrifice? Did he not slay Narginaut's children?"

The Enmakai settlement came into view.

Alitet let go the tiller and stood up in the stern. A look of fear passed over his face. His sunken cheeks quivered. He stared in consternation in the direction of the settlement.

A high wooden house with an iron roof gleaming in the sun stood among the yarangs. The windowpanes made mirrors for the sunbeams.

The occupants of the boat stared at one another with a mute question. Their look seemed to say: Does everyone see it?

The ghosts continued to haunt them.

"How did this wooden yarang get here?" Alitet asked in a low voice, staring at the house in alarm.

Alitet's fear and the appearance of this new wooden yarang in the settlement awoke a vague sense of happiness in Tygrena's heart. And for some reason she was again reminded of the bearded Russian chief.

"Hey, you, men! Why are you silent?" Alitet shouted.

"We left the settlement six days ago, but everything



then was as of old," Tygrena said in a tone of heightened emotion. "How that wooden yarang got there no one knows."

The dogs dashed for the settlement at full speed, leaving their driver Vaamcho far behind. A foaming wake swirled behind the bidarka.

On the porch steps of the new house stood a tall young man with a slightly pock-marked face, dressed in Russian clothes. He smoked a pipe as he gazed at the approaching bidarka, and the wisps of tobacco smoke drifted lazily in the pure, crystal air. This was the schoolteacher Dvorkin.

CHAPTER SIX

The sun made its appearance ever more rarely. It was wrapped in fog or in banks of white humid clouds.

The days grew very short. Soon, winter came. It was the end of September and the ground was already covered with snow. Never had the newly-arrived members of the Revcom staff greeted winter so early. Nostalgia gripped them as they gazed at the white curtain that shut out the horizon. But for all that, the great expanses and the grim majesty of the North captivated them. Besides, Los saw to it that nobody was bored.

The Revcom people in the new house studied the Chukchi language every day. The Revcom resembled an ethnographical faculty, the dean and professor of which was Los.

There were now three schools on the coast, the Red Cross service had started work, and the Soviet fur-trading posts were conducting trade with the population.

The Tribal Soviets grew active too. Letters arrived at the Revcom from all over the region, brought by hunters. The chairmen of the Tribal Soviets came down for the "living word."

"This is when the work starts!" Los thought joyfully as he read through his mail. He was particularly interested in a letter from the trading-post manager Rusakov. He flattened out the crumpled letter on the desk and called out to his secretary in the next room:

"Petya, tell Osipov I want him, will you."

While he was waiting for the Revcom instructor Los paced up and down his office. It was a clean, spacious room, and Los surveyed it with an inward smile. On the wall hung a map of the U.S.S.R. and a large map of the Chukotsk Peninsula, his own handiwork, with all the settlements indicated on it. Above the writing desk hung portraits of Lenin and Stalin. On the opposite wall was a small portrait of Leo Tolstoy, taken out of some book.

Osipov came in.

"Here's an interesting letter from Rusakov," Los said. "True, I've got a pretty good idea of the situation out there myself. The point is that there are two distinct groups in the settlement, which is divided by a ravine. On one side of the ravine we have the hunters who distrust us, and on the other side people who obviously sympathize with us. Well, Rusakov has organized a fishing and hunting artel on this side of the settlement. He writes that if we give them a whaleboat with a motor the population on the other side is likely to join it too."

"We must give them a whaleboat, of course," Osipov said.

"Yes.... But things are a bit more complicated than that. The other group of hunters has a leader, a kinsman of the Eskimos from the American islands. A hale and hearty old man with one eye. He's the best hunter. They call him 'The Man Who Sees From Above.' A tough old

fellow. Has a strong hold on all the group. An unassailable authority. You can't win him over so easily. But we should! He's a mainstay for Alitet."

"I'll go out there and give Rusakov a hand," Osipov said.

"To influence the population? A very tough job. Andrei and I worked at it a whole year, and meanwhile the Americans brought their influence to bear through goods. True, we weren't always unsuccessful, but now we've got every opportunity to influence them by deeds. We'll begin in the spring, before the hunting season opens and when we launch the artel whaleboat. But now it doesn't pay to get on the old man's nerves and ruin the job. To win him over you have to show him something real. We'll wait until spring. Meantime I give you two months' vacation."

Osipov burst out laughing.

"Vacation?"

"Yes, to tackle the language. I shall expect you to speak it freely in two months' time."

"I don't think it can be done in two months."

"You've got to. You have to make up your mind to do it."

"I'll try."

"We haven't got the time to try. You've got to do it. Otherwise it's impossible to work here."

"All right," Osipov said, but not with too much confidence.

Old Ilyich came in. Los greeted him in Chukchi and offered him a chair. The old man sat down, then instantly lowered himself onto the floor and crossed his legs under him.

"Los," the old man said importantly, "news has come. The steamer is standing in the ice off the cape, farther north. And there is no smoke. It has stopped altogether for the whole winter."

He was so struck by the news of the *Soviet* wintering in the ice that he pulled out his pipe and hastily lit up. As if afraid to ask about the steamer he took a deep puff and said:

"What other news is there?"

"No other news."

"Haven't you heard anything about the teacher your son Ermen took down?"

"No, no rumours whatever."

"And the militiaman?"

"There is no more news."

Los' face clouded. He relit his pipe.

"Unpleasant news!" he said to Osipov.

"What's the matter?" Osipov asked.

"The *Soviet* is icebound. The ship will be out of commission for ten months. That's a big setback," Los said with a sigh. "The merchant fleet in the Far East at present has altogether a few score vessels, and one of them I, the Revcom Representative, have driven into the ice fields for the sake of a little school in the Enmakai settlement. Have I done right?" Los said reflectively.

"It's hard to say, Nikita Sergeyevich."

"No, it isn't. I acted right. We Bolsheviki can't take a mercantile view in such cases. It's the very essence of our national policy. . . . Oh well, Ilyich, thanks for the news. If you hear anything more, come and tell me. Have a smoke before you go."

Nevertheless, Los did not feel any too good when he thought about the steamer. Inwardly he was still unable to decide whether or not he had done the right thing. Another source of irritation was the silence of the radio station. He drew on his parka and went off to see the radio operator.

From Molodtsov's sheepish smile he gathered that the station was still out of commission.

Los could not hold himself back. "That good name* of yours is one big mistake!" he said irritably.

"I've worn myself out too, Nikita Sergeyevich. It makes my heart bleed. Feel like putting my head in a noose. I just can't manage to get it working." Tears welled up in Molodtsov's eyes.

"But my dear fellow, why did you ever come out here? You're depriving me of contact with the world. Why, that's killing! Did you or didn't you ever work at this job before?"

Molodtsov sat silent, with head lowered. He was fully alive to his guilt, but the harder he tried to get the unfamiliar radio apparatus working the more mixed up he became.

"In Petropavlovsk I had a good work record—both reception and transmission," he said in self-justification. "That's why I was sent here. But it seems I'm weak in radio engineering."

"Who's the idiot who sent you? You know that out here there's no operator next door to ask help from. And so we have to sit here like a marmot in his hole. Now tell me out and out: will you or won't you be able to get the station going?"

"I don't know, Nikita Sergeyevich."

Los waved his hand in disgust and walked out of the station without another word. "Better if we didn't have it altogether," he thought. "More peace of mind."

CHAPTER SEVEN

The migratory birds had abandoned the Chukotsk area; only belated flocks winged southward. The entire coast was lined with ice fields that stretched far beyond

* From the Russian word *molodets*, meaning a brave or clever person.—*Trans.*

the horizon. Winter, the mistress of this region, had arrived.

It was a quiet morning. Somewhere a dog howled.

Out in the ice fields, against the snow-white pall of the earth, sea and sky, a streak of smoke suddenly rose to the heavens. The whole population of the settlement was agog in an instant. People rushed to the beach.

Los snatched up a spyglass and climbed to the roof of the house. He saw a steamer fighting her way through the ice fields toward the open water. At times she put back and came on again at full speed, heaving her whole hulk onto the ice, crushing and cleaving it. She drove in ice anchors and dragged the floes apart, but they converged again.

A crowd gathered round the Revcom house. Everyone gazed with curiosity at the icebound sea.

"It's an ice breaker!" Los suddenly cried out from the roof.

The vessel struggled out of the ice and bore down swiftly on the settlement through an open lane of sea.

Los made out the ship's name.

"The *Krasny Oktyabr*!" he shouted. "Formerly the *Nadezhny*."

The *Krasny Oktyabr* emitted a long blast which echoed among the hills.

Los hastily climbed down from the roof, harnessed the dog team and made off with Ermen towards the steamer. The sledge bobbed up and down among the hummocks.

... Lost in the wastes of the Arctic Ocean far from the Chukotsk shores, Wrangel Island, discovered by Russian navigators, had attracted the attention of British marauders. They took advantage of the situation then prevailing in the Far East to occupy the island in defiance of international law. A man by the name of Wells landed there with a party of men.

Acting on Government instructions, the expedition of hydrologist Davydov took the alien party off the island and hoisted a metallic Soviet flag.

The *Krasny Oktyabr* was now homeward bound from Wrangel Island and had used up all its coal in its battle with the ice. All the ship's wooden structures, rigging, flour and sugar—everything combustible—had found their way into the furnaces. The crew was in dire straits.

Los drove up to the ship, and the lookout conducted him immediately to the chief of the expedition.

Professor Davydov, the eminent hydrologist who headed the expedition, met Los in silence. He shook hands with him and perfunctorily introduced the commissar of the expedition, Domnikov. Their faces wore a look of deep anxiety. These two men were responsible for the lives of the entire crew, consisting of a hundred and twenty sailors of the fleet. They gave Los a brief account of the object of their expedition and the predicament they were in.

Los, as he sat down in a metal armchair, threw a look round the cabin. The walls were stripped; rusty iron was to be seen on all sides.

"By what right did the Englishmen land on our island?" he asked.

"On the dictum: grab all you can lay your hands on. But they miscalculated somewhat. We put the wind up that Wells fellow," the commissar said with a laugh. "When we hove in sight of the island he came dashing out to us in a boat, apparently taking us for an English ship. But he promptly turned tail when he noticed the red flag over the stern. We had to stop his boat with a couple of cannon shots. It was very important for us to get hold of his logbook."

"He shivered as though he had a fit of the ague when we got him on board. He thought the Bolsheviks would send him to kingdom come. He's set his mind at ease

now—as cheerful as a bird and thinks the world of Russian vodka,” the chief of the expedition added.

“I’ll show you this Wells fellow,” the commissar said to Los.

“Who the devil wants him! I’ve seen enough Americans here. Instead you tell me where the *Soviet* is stranded. Are you in touch with her?”

“Why, the *Soviet* is now nearing Vladivostok.”

Los was astounded. “What? There were rumours here that she’s wintering off North Cape.”

“That was us. We put our boilers out and got settled down to winter. But then we spotted a stretch of open water from the top and decided to risk slipping through,” the commissar explained.

“We’re now in the deuce of a fix,” the chief of the expedition said gloomily. “We’ve used up every ounce of coal and stripped the ship to the bone, as you can see.” He sighed, then went on, “Didn’t manage to make the Providence coaling station. Mind you, we don’t need very much coal. We could drift with the ice now, but we haven’t any wintering supplies. We’re faced by the terrible prospect of abandoning the vessel and going ashore. A crew of a hundred and twenty!”

Los listened attentively to what the chief of the expedition was saying. Meanwhile he thought, “I have a hundred and fifty tons of coal. Should I give it to them? No, that’s impossible. It means winding up Revcom activities. On the other hand, didn’t Andrei and I winter here without coal, and the work still went on? In a pinch we could shut up the new house and live in the yarangs.”

Commissar Domnikov said:

“There’s nothing left on the ship that could serve as fuel, but still we can’t abandon it.”

Los unbuttoned the collar of his tunic with a grunt.

“I suppose I’ll have to help you,” he said.

"In what way can you help?" the chief of the expedition asked in a puzzled tone.

"I have a hundred and fifty tons—"

"Of coal?!" Davydov and the commissar exclaimed in chorus.

"Yes, coal."

"Call the chief engineer at once," Davydov joyously cried to the man on duty. Then turning to Los he asked, "That coal is your heating supply, isn't it? How will you live the winter without it?"

"Don't you worry about us, Comrade Chief, we'll manage all right," Los said in a tone of decision.

The chief engineer came in.

"How much coal do we need to make the coaling station?" the chief asked.

The engineer worked it out in his head, then said in a melancholy voice:

"About two hundred tons."

"We've got a hundred."

"No, a hundred and fifty," Los hastened to rectify.

"No, no!" Davydov said emphatically, raising his hand. "And what will you cook porridge on?" Turning to the engineer he added, "So there you are, comrade engineer, a hundred tons."

"That'll do the trick, I guess," the chief engineer answered cheerfully.

The glad news spread throughout the ship in an instant. An accordion started playing, and a sailor on deck began dancing a lively hopak.

"What's your name and patronymic?" the chief of the expedition asked Los.

"Nikita Sergeyevich."

"In what way can we thank you, Nikita Sergeyevich?"

"There's no need to, Comrade Chief. We've got one trouble though. Our radio station is out of order. I was wondering whether you couldn't help us to get it going,



comrades. That lad of mine doesn't seem to be able to do it."

Davydov called out the first mate and ordered:

"Comrade First Mate, get all hands out on bunkering. Release the radio operators from this emergency job and send the whole shift ashore Right away. The radio station ashore needs seeing to Have we got any sacks for carrying over the coal?"

"Yes."

"There's no need for carrying it. We'll do it much quicker on dog teams," Los said, "I'll go ashore right now and get together all the sledges in the neighbourhood. We'll do it in no time."

"Fine! We've got to look sharp about it anyway. Ice conditions are changing almost every hour."

Night fell. The ship turned on a searchlight and lit up the icebound sea with the groups of sailors making across it for the shore. They reached the beach to find dog teams already standing by the coal dump.

The sailors quickly filled the sacks with coal and the team drivers lashed them down in their sledges. Towards midnight Los brought up several dozen more sledges from the neighbouring settlements. The sledges plied between the coast and the ship all night long in the glare of the searchlight.

Los, worn out after the hectic day and sleepless night, came to the ship with the last dog team.

The funnel of the *Krásny Oktyabr* belched thick black smoke. The hull vibrated to the working of the engines. The ship was ready to sail. Her siren gave a farewell blast.

Davydov took a hearty leave of Los. Retaining his hand in his, he said in a deeply moved voice:

"You have saved the ship, Nikita Sergeyevich, and perhaps the whole crew! Accept my hearty gratitude on behalf of the entire crew."

Los smiled in embarrassment. He climbed down onto the ice. The *Krasny Oktyabr* started off and sailed into clear water.

On deck the crew waved their caps at Los' team bobbing up and down among the hummocks. A seaman standing on the top kept waving his cap for a long time, until a fog crept up.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Los awoke late. He lifted the edge of the blanket and peeped at the stove heater with a smile. Lame Nalek hobbled about the room, treading noiselessly so as not to waken the master. Nalek was very keen on his job. He could not go out hunting, and here he had suddenly become almost a rich man. Nalek got papers for his work—rubles—and bought everything a man needed at the trading post, for all the world like a real hunter.

There was a knock at the door. Nalek darted to the door, opened it slightly and warned the visitor with a silent gesture that Los was sleeping.

"Who is it?" Los asked.

"The teacher," Nalek answered in a whisper.

"Come in, Skorikov, come right in!" Los said, getting out of bed. "Well, how are things in the educational field?"

"Fine, Nikita Sergeyeovich! The school's going full steam ahead. I am thinking of opening a group for adult illiterates. There are candidates waiting already. What do you say?" the teacher asked, sitting down on the window sill.

"Good! An excellent idea. In general, Skorikov, you should try to make your school a model institution. This is the county centre, after all!" Los said with a wink.

"I'm ready to work day and night, Nikita Sergeyeovich."

"Finel"

"Fine, but not altogether, Nikita Sergeyevich. A fuss is starting over that coal business."

"What fuss?" Los growled, combing his hair.

"There was some tongue wagging this morning in the dining room about Los being used to living in the cold, it's all right for him! The Revcom secretary Petya and the accountant are solving the coal problem their own way."

"Nobody gave 'em any right to solve that problem!" Los said sharply.

"They're afraid you'll turn the rest of the coal over to the school."

Los smiled and said:

"They're right there. Don't you worry, Skorikov. The school at any rate will not go short of coal. You may be sure of that."

"I wanted to drive it into their thick heads, too, but I didn't get a chance. They kicked up such a shindy, almost raised the roof. Even Nilovna, the cook, tried to make them see reason."

Nilovna, an elderly woman, had worked on the *Soviet* as scullery maid, and at Los' request the captain had transferred her ashore. Here, in the Revcom dining room, she acted as cook and prepared excellent meals from venison and wild fowl. This efficient woman found time to do everything—she did the cooking, laid the table and served the meals.

When the Revcom staff came to dinner, Los said:

"Sit down for a minute, Nilovna." Then, addressing the rest of the company, he went on, "We're making a bad start here, comrades."

"Don't you like the way I cook?" Nilovna struck in anxiously.

"You cook very well, Nilovna. It's not that. It appears that we have grumblers among us. I hear that certain

members of our little community are beginning to act up. They are more concerned with taking care of number one: they express dissatisfaction over the fact that I gave the coal away. Let's talk straight from the shoulder: accountant Prygunov is at the bottom of this fuss." Los pointed his finger at him. "That kind of conduct does not become a Soviet person. Shame on you, Comrade Prygunov! Old Ilyich, even he said to me, 'You acted right, Los. Shared your coal. Like a real hunter.' " Los' face turned red and he shouted, "And you, what kind of talk have you started? Afraid you'll freeze? Got fish blood in your veins?" He took a deep breath and added in a calm voice, "Never fear—you won't freeze. When the coal gives out we'll put up a lock on the Revcom building and we'll all move into yarangs. Nothing but good will come from that—both for the people and for ourselves. That's all. And I don't want this question ever raised again. We have more important things to do. Nilovna, let's have dinner!"

A deep hush descended on the room. The only sound was the footfalls of Nilovna retiring into the kitchen. Then someone asked to be allowed to speak.

"We are going to have no speaking, no discussions. The thing's clear enough, and that's that," Los said in a tone of finality. "I'm more worried over the fate of the militiaman and the teacher Dvorkin than all this idle chatter. We haven't had any news about them all this time. Not a word. I have decided to go up to the northern part of the coast. There's no information about the geologist either. I shall probably set out today. I want you here to keep in closer touch with the people. It will help you learn the language quicker and get to know the soul of the people. It is a good soul. I'll be back in a month and a half or two and will send you all out to the different settlements. In the spring we'll call our first conference. There'll be two questions on the agenda. The

first will be: the national policy of the Soviet Government and the work of the Tribal Soviets. The second question—the sea hunting trade. You turn these matters over in your own minds too. If I'm held up—you, Osipov, will have to go down to Loren and see how Zhohov is conducting trade. Do everything you can to strengthen Yarak's position as manager of the fur warehouse. I can see from Zhohov's letters that he's trying to introduce the thin end of the wedge, wants to get rid of him. Zhohov is a jack-in-office and a self-seeker, and doesn't see a damn thing beyond his nose. Give the Red Cross and the school a leg up if they need it. See if Mary's working as nurse. And what's especially important, see to it that Mary has her confinement at the Red Cross and doesn't take orders from the shaman. Get me? Have a talk with the doctor and with Yarak. That's a special assignment."

"Something suspicious in your thinking about her so much, Nikita Sergeyevich," the Revcom secretary remarked with a smirk.

"What?" Los shouted, flaring up. But the next instant he said calmly, "A Revcom secretary is supposed to have a bit more sense. Ideas of that kind can give rise to gossip. . . . Now listen, Osipov, that's a most important matter. It's not easy to tear childbirth cases away from the shaman. The doctor writes that they don't come to the hospital. Mary has to start the ball rolling. Tell her Los said so."

Nilovna came up with a pot and deftly ladled out soup.

"I don't want any soup, Nilovna," Los said. "Bring me the meat dish."

"Why, Nikita Sergeyevich! Just taste it. You never had anything like it in a Vladivostok restaurant. You should have seen what a juicy reindeer it was!"

Los grinned. "Maybe I ought to try it, eh?"

"Absolutely, absolutely. Otherwise I'll quit my job."

"Well, in the face of such drastic measures I guess I'll have to." And Los forced himself to eat some soup.

After dinner Los went to the old Revcom building, which now housed the radio station. He walked over the crunching snow, and the frost nipped his face with a pleasant tingling sensation. He breathed deeply.

He ran up the porch steps, burst noisily into the room and asked in a cheery voice:

"Well, Ilyusha, how's it going?"

Molodtsov took off the earphones and answered with a beaming face:

"Petropavlovsk has just taken down our telegrams to the Gubernia Revcom. I'm going to check up Kolyma's call letters, just in case."

"Good, Ilyusha. I'll give you a bearskin for a bonus. Want one?"

"What for, Nikita Sergeyevich?" Molodtsov asked in embarrassment. "I haven't done anything yet."

"You will later, Ilyusha."

"Yes, of course, I'll try hard, but what do I want a bearskin for? I should say the state needs it more."

"That's right, Ilyusha. Still, I want to give you a bonus. D'you know what bonus I'll give you—ten tons of coal."

"That's wonderful! I heard something about the coal being distributed according to plan with a ton and a quarter for my share. After all, I've got all this apparatus here. It's got to be kept in normal conditions."

"You're going to get ten tons."

"Thanks awfully, Nikita Sergeyevich!"

"Send an enquiry to the Gubernia Revcom in my name and ask whether they know Zhukov's address or his whereabouts."

In the evening Los set out for the northern part of the coast alone, without a team driver.

CHAPTER NINE

As soon as the steamer *Soviet* left Enmakai, Dvorkin began a thorough study of Los' copybook dictionary. He uttered Chukchi phrases aloud in the empty schoolhouse, copied them out in his own notebook, then went to the yarangs to verify or record some new word.

Upon coming once into a yarang he could not get a word out of its occupants. No one wanted to speak to him, not even the children. The teacher did not suspect that Korauge the shaman had frightened the people and forbidden them on pain of dire misfortune—the death of all the children—to have intercourse with the Russian who had come to live in the settlement in that big wooden yarang. The teacher made enquiries about Vaamcho and Tygrena, but he failed to elicit any information.

The schoolteacher found himself utterly isolated. That tall strapping man was dismayed. It was mortifying to realize that the people for whose sake he had come out to this remote country and for whom he was all eagerness to do something good, did not want to speak to him.

And so the teacher walked from end to end of the schoolhouse corridor. When he came out onto the beach where the children thronged, the latter instantly ran off to their yarangs.

"What's to be done?" Dvorkin thought, but found no answer.

The main trouble, however, was that the *Soviet* had unexpectedly weighed anchor and put out to sea on account of unfavourable ice conditions, and had not had time to discharge the coal. They had left a fine house with triple-framed glass windows standing on the shore, but without anything to heat it. How was one to live in it in the winter?

The teacher decided in his own mind that the people would speak up sooner or later. That depressing silence

couldn't last for ever. It began to dawn on him that this was undoubtedly the shaman's doing.

Still, how was he to teach the children in a cold building?

One day Dvorkin was sitting by the window gazing forlornly at the sea. He smoked a pipe and amused himself by blowing smoke rings.

Dvorkin recalled how he had made the voyage out here, what a good time he had had on the steamer, how the men had begun to build the new Revcom house and how warmly the local people had welcomed the Russians. You would think there were different people living here. "Los was right—it isn't an easy place," he thought.

Through the window the teacher caught sight of a bidarka approaching the shore and went out on the porch.

The shaman Korauge hastened out to meet the bidarka. He scuttled along in a great hurry, as though afraid the teacher would forestall him. Dvorkin, however, remained standing on the porch. The bidarka came up and the shaman was lost in the crowd.

It often happens that a man, in finding himself in a perilous situation, summons the strength to fight for his life, but when the danger is over his strength deserts him and he becomes a helpless wreck. That is what happened to Alitet. He dropped on the beach as soon as he stepped out of the boat.

Dvorkin saw people leading a sick man in tattered clothes who could hardly drag his feet along.

"Who is that?" the teacher wondered.

The crowd passed some distance from the school. No one as much as glanced at it. Only one woman looked in the teacher's direction and sent a friendly nod to this newcomer to their native shores. That was Tygrena.

The people proceeded to Alitet's yarang, and the teacher guessed that the sick man was Alitet.

The next day Vaamcho came to the school. He walked in timidly, embarrassed.

Dvorkin was overjoyed at his visit. This was the first person to come to the school. He pressed his visitor into a chair by the table and offered him tea.

"You are Vaamcho?" Dvorkin asked, recalling Zhukov, who had spoken of him.

Vaamcho nodded his head in confirmation.

The teacher had great difficulty in carrying on a conversation with him. Fingers and the most amazing variety of gesticulations were resorted to on both sides. And surprisingly enough, they understood each other. Vaamcho agreed to become chairman again, and took the paper which Zhukov had sent. They arranged that the teacher should conduct his lessons with the pupils, if any, in Vaamcho's yarang. Vaamcho imitated the sound of a snow blizzard, by way of illustrating what the coming winter was like. Vaamcho mimicked these things so cleverly that Dvorkin had no difficulty in following him. The "conversation" terminated with Vaamcho illustrating a yarang, putting his hand to his ear and prodding Dvorkin in the chest with a finger, which meant that he was inviting the teacher to put up in his yarang for the winter.

That day the teacher wrote down many new Chukchi words and even notions.

Vaamcho got home late. He was elated by his meeting with the Russian teacher and told his wife Alek about it. Alek was silent. What gladdened Vaamcho frightened her. She began urging Vaamcho to throw the paper away and not let the teacher into their yarang.

During this domestic conversation Tygrena dropped in.

"I was afraid of Alitet all the time!" she began excitedly. "He lay without saying a word and kept eating all the time. I thought he was thinking up what sacrifice to make to the spirits. But now everything is all right.

I am not afraid for Aivam any more. Alitet has changed his name. He calls himself Charlie. His name now is Charlie. True, his face is still wicked. He has gone out alone to the rocks. Maybe he wishes to become a shaman? I watched him all the time. He and Korauge are afraid of this Russian after all."

"Tygrena, it was Los who sent the teacher to us," Vaamcho said. "He is going to help us. He has brought me a new paper. They want me to become chairman again."

"You become chairman, Vaamcho," Tygrena said emphatically.

Alek grew furious with Tygrena and crawled away into a corner with her baby in her arms, her eyes blazing. She muttered something angrily under her breath.

Vaamcho sat listening to Tygrena and watching Alek. He was placed in a dilemma. Again these two women were pulling him different ways.

"Alek," Tygrena said, "Korauge that time invented the news about the grizzly bear. You burnt that paper over the fire for nothing. They make their lives on deceit. You cannot believe them—I ought to know that. I think, Alek, that Vaamcho should remain the chairman. Maybe they will stop laughing at him. When Korauge came back that time from the bonfire I heard him laughing together with Alitet. They were laughing at Vaamcho."

"Tygrena, why do you call him Alitet? Has he not changed his name?" Vaamcho observed gravely.

"I do not care. I do it on purpose, so that the spirits should hear how he is trying to throw them off the scent. You become chairman, Vaamcho."

"Alek, do you hear what Tygrena says? It seems to me she speaks the truth."

"I don't know. You know best. . . . Only I will not go to the tundra for the roots of plants. I don't want the bear to maul me as he did your father," Alek retorted angrily.

"Oh, all right! I'll have to go myself," Vaamcho said in a tone of annoyance.

"No, Vaamcho, you must not go," Tygrena put in. "If you start doing women's work men will laugh at you. I shall go myself to gather roots for you as soon as Alitet goes away."

Vaamcho listened and said nothing. Then suddenly he grew angry—it was unworthy of a hunter to discuss women's work. He got up in silence and went out of the yarang. Tygrena ran after him.

"Vaamcho, wait. Let us stand here where no one can see us."

"I shall go, Tygrena, go and see the Russian. His name is Dvorkin. He asked you to come too. And have you heard the news?"

"What news?"

"When the ship came here and brought this house Aye was on it."

"Aye?" Tygrena exclaimed in great agitation. "He was here? Why did he come?"

"The ship took him away to the Mainland. To the Russians. Aye is lost now!" Vaamcho said with a sigh.

"They took him away? The Russians?" she asked in dismay.

"Yes, they took him away.... He looked sad here. There was sorrow in his face all the time. Alek told me."

Tygrena stared at Vaamcho in silence with wide-open eyes. Her breath came fast and laboured.

Vaamcho pointed to the school building and said:

"Tygrena, let us go to the teacher. He will tell us something about the Russian country."

Tygrena continued to stand in silence. Her eyes were filled with rage.

"I shall not go to him," she said. "I shall never go to that Russian!"

CHAPTER TEN

The school was opened in Vaamcho's yarang, as the children refused to go to the wooden house, where it was still possible to carry on lessons before the winter came. But they did not go to the yarang either: their parents would not allow them.

Then the teacher went out to the walrus hunt in Vaamcho's bidarka together with the widowed women.

The teacher was a strong man; he could sit at the oars from morning to night without showing any sign of fatigue. The women got used to him and even joked with him. They had not laughed for many days, ever since they heard that their husbands had drowned. They decided that this Russian man had come here to help them with the hunting. Indeed, he proved to be a very good shot, a real hunter.

It happened that the hunting was lucky for a week running. The bidarka brought in walruses every day. And when there is meat in the home and a person has enough to eat, there are less worries on his mind and his heart grows jolly. Stocks were already sufficient, but the teacher still kept urging Wakat to go out hunting. Tumatuge's widow had never had so much meat before, though her husband had been the best hunter on Alitet's whaleboat. Wakat was happy. Though Tumatuge was drowned, there was food enough for the whole winter. The most surprising thing was that this Russian gave his share of meat away to the women without leaving a scrap for himself. When the bidarka was being unloaded he hauled the heaviest parts of the walrus ashore. All his clothes were covered with the blood of the sea beast. The women quickly sewed the teacher a waterproof garment of walrus gut, and when Dvorkin donned it they nearly burst their sides with laughter. Even Alek, who looked askance at the teacher, began to get used to him.

Dvorkin made a study of the anatomy of the walrus during the hunt and could expertly dress the carcass, but he could not for the life of him learn to whet the knife on a cobblestone, and that too amused the womenfolk. They vied with one another in doing this service for him with many a nod and smile in his direction.

"You just wait till next year when the Revcom sends us down a whaleboat with a machine—talk about hunting then!" the teacher said, skilfully dressing the walrus carcass.

Imperceptibly a good hunting artel was created. And all suddenly saw that the teacher was not a bad man at all.

The artel was a jolly affair. How gladly Tygrena would have joined it! But she would not go to them because a Russian was there, and the Russians had taken Aye away.

Alitet sat his wives in a bidarka and also made a stock of meat. He could not let things reach a pass when he would be obliged to ask those women from the artel for a piece of meat and fat!

Life had turned keel upwards, and all because of this Russian from the wooden yarang.

Then winter came, the ice fields closed in with the shore and walrus hunting ceased.

The teacher gathered the women in the chill school-house and spoke to them about their children starting lessons. The women found it awkward to refuse. After all, it was with his help that they had laid aside enough meat for the whole year. They agreed to send only their little girls to Vaamcho's yarang. They were still afraid of the shaman, and he had strictly forbidden the boys to be sent to school.

Alek resigned herself to the teacher's presence in her yarang and went about her domestic duties without paying any attention to the girl pupils. True, there were



only three of them. They lay flat on their stomachs tracing pothooks and hangers. They gave themselves up to this new "game" with enthusiasm.

Alek stole occasional glances at them and the teacher, and thought, "it is hard to understand these Russian people. That great big Russian is like a child himself. He ought to go out in the ice fields seal hunting. There are so few men in the settlement. And he sits here playing with the children!"

Clad only in a loincloth, Alek would step over pupils and teacher to hang the kettle over the burner or she would drag out a sodden smelly sealskin and begin scraping it right there in the middle of the yarang. Very often the baby squalled.

Dvorkin drew a painful sigh and went on with his lessons. It was hot and stuffy in the polog. He himself sat without a shirt—it grew damp on him.

For the first few days the teacher thought he would not be able to endure this environment, but endured it had to be. Gradually he got used to everything. The girls were so keen on their school lessons that it became the talk of the settlement. Soon newcomers came to the school—two girls and a boy.

Alek was surprised that the children had taken to the school. It was probably because they were silly things!

The first meeting of the Tribal Soviet, to which two women had recently been elected, was held one evening in Vaamcho's yarang. The schoolteacher said that it wasn't good to throw the bodies of dead dogs outside the dwellings. Two of Alitet's dogs with ripped-open bellies lay about in the settlement and

the living dogs were dragging their entrails about the place.

The Tribal Soviet adopted a resolution not to leave dead dogs lying about the settlement but to have them carried out some distance away in the tundra.

The next day, early in the morning, Vaamcho went to Alitet. He remembered how during the lifetime of his father, old Vaal, he had gone to Alitet to ask for a piece of meat and fat. He had not wanted to go to Alitet that time but had gone out of pity for his old mother who was freezing in the cold polog. Vaamcho remembered the bottle of kerosene, that stuff which Alitet had poured over his fox bait. He remembered his father's words, "Alitet must be an utterly bad man if he has poured lamp fat over our bait." He remembered, too, his dog Chegit whom he had killed on the shaman's orders, and all the evil which Alitet had done.

Encouraged by the teacher's support, Vaamcho set out with an air of dignified importance, firm in his resolve to speak boldly with Alitet, as Dvorkin had taught him.

Entering Alitet's polog without waiting for the host's customary greeting, Vaamcho firmly uttered the words he had thought out in advance:

"Clear the dead dogs from the settlement! That is the decision of the Tribal Soviet."

Vaamcho's independent tone struck Alitet dumb. Alitet stared at him in stunned silence.

"Clear the dogs away at once! Mind they're not left lying about," Vaamcho repeated sternly.

Alitet sat up on the skins, clasped his bare knees and, staring fixedly at Vaamcho, asked with a sneer, almost in a whisper:

"From what settlement are you? Or is this the first time you have seen dead dogs in the settlement? Eh? Who are you?"

"I am the chairman," Vaamcho answered defiantly, and opening out his certificate he added, "Here it is, the chairman paper! It has come back again."

"Where do you get the boldness to speak to me like that? Eh?"

"I always had it. Only it was hidden away. Now it has come out. Because you are not strong any more. You always boasted of your Merican friend and tried to frighten me with him. Now he is gone. And I have made many Russian friends." Vaamcho began counting on his fingers. "Los is my friend, Andrei is my friend, the teacher is my friend, the trading man in the Russian trading post is my friend too. See how many friends? They are stronger than Charlie Red Nose. Charlie was friends only with you, but they are friends with all hunters. That is what the teacher says. This time I will not hold my tongue if you pour Tang lamp fat over bait again... Clear away the dead dogs!" Vaamcho said in a demanding tone.

"You crazy man, do you want to bring the evil spirits down on our settlement?" Alitet said in a threatening tone. "The dogs will lie about until they rot."

"No, they will not. The new law does not want to see them," Vaamcho snapped and went out.

"I spit on your law, I have my own law!" Alitet shouted after him.

Tygreña, who had heard the conversation through the fur curtain, gazed after the retreating Vaamcho with a smile of elation. She had never known him so bold before. He hurried to the outer door without noticing Tygreña.

Vaamcho went straight to the teacher. The two then set out to where the dead dogs lay.

"We shall throw them into a patch of open water, Vaamcho," the teacher said on the way.

"No, we mustn't do that. It will be bad. We may anger the evil spirits. The sea beast will stop coming to our coast. We must drag them out into the tundra."

Dvorkin acquiesced with a smile. They dragged the dead dogs by the hind legs out of the settlement, away from the coast... Alitet stood in the doorway of his yarang watching them. He clenched his fists in impotent rage, and his fingernails, which were hard as whalebone, sank into his palms.

School lessons continued.

One day Alitet came into Vaamcho's yarang. He was drunk. His cheeks had filled out and put on flesh, and they were flushed from the severe frost and alcohol. Though dressed only in a light undergarment, a tanned parka, Alitet did not seem to feel the cold. His hate-filled eyes alighted on the teacher.

"What have you come here for? You are out to spoil our people! The people don't want you to live here. Go back to the Russians!" he snarled.

Dvorkin did not understand everything Alitet said.

"Don't interrupt our lessons, Alitet!" he said.

"He's not here. It is Charlie who has come. I am Charlie!" Alitet said, beating his breast.

Dvorkin consulted Los' dictionary and then shouted:

"*Kanto!*"*

Alitet's eyes gleamed like those of a wild beast. He seized the teacher's leg and started to drag him out of the yarang.

"Drop that!" the teacher cried.

But Alitet persisted furiously. He dragged the teacher outside. The teacher twisted over on his back and knocked off Alitet's grip with a powerful kick of his right leg. He leapt to his feet and landed a swinging blow on

* Go 'away!—*Trans.*

Alitet's jaw. Alitet sprang at the teacher. Another powerful blow sent him sprawling on the snow.

Dvorkin, his face flushed, gazed sternly at Alitet, waiting for him to get up.

Alitet, however, lay in the snow and looked up at Dvorkin, baring his teeth in a grin. He said, without getting up:

"Nobody has ever knocked me down yet along this coast."

The teacher shook his fist at him and went inside to continue the lessons.

The next day, while the class was sitting at its lesson, Goi-Goi, Alitet's son, came into Vaamcho's yarang.

"My father has sent me to learn," he said.

"Very good!" Dvorkin said. "Take your things off."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

On the twelfth day of his departure from Revcom headquarters Los arrived at Spring Cove. The slopes of the bay seemed to him to be deserted. The tips of three snowed-up yarangs were faintly visible on the hillside, but even these dwellings were scattered far apart.

The wind hugged the ground, and the sky was so low that it seemed to be pressing down on those three miserable little dwellings. How strange that here, somewhere close by, there could be living human beings!

Los drew his team up by the nearest yarang. A man popped up seemingly from under the snow with an uncovered head and greeted Los with a friendly smile.

"Old man," said Los, "have you heard anything about a Russian man who was to have been set ashore here last autumn?"

"Is that man a Cochak?" the old man asked.

The word "militiaman" had not yet come into usage on the coast, and out of habit the people called the militiaman a "Cochak," that is Cossack.

"We built him that little yarang over there," the old man said, pointing his crutch at the dwelling.

Militiaman Khokhlov lay sleeping, stretched from end to end of the little polog. A pretty girl in a flowered cotton dress sat sewing by the burner.

"Good day," Los said.

The girl looked at him in surprise, then threw aside her sewing and began to shake Khokhlov, who was dressed in reindeer calfskin trousers and a regulation tunic. He stretched, yawned, opened his eyes, and sat up in an instant. Then he rose on his knees and smoothed out his moustache with a swift gesture.

"Permit me to report, Comrade Revcom Representative—"

"Hold, hold on!" Los broke in. "What d'you take me for—a holy saint? What are you standing on your knees for?"

"That's the only way, Comrade Revcom Representative. Can't stand up to full height in here," the militiaman said in a flustered voice.

"You don't have to. Lie down and let's have a chat. First of all—what's this girl doing here?"

"She's not a girl, Comrade Revcom Representative, she's my wife."

"So you've married! Are you serious about it?"

"Why, of course, Comrade Revcom Representative. She's pregnant already. . . . You can't live here alone. Before a fellow got used to the loneliness he'd commit suicide. And then a man needs to have his food cooked, clothes made, and one thing and another. Besides, with her I get to talk their language quicker and folks look on me as one of their own. They've already helped me knock together a dog team. In Gubernia Militia



Headquarters they probably figure you can get a dog here for fifty kopeks, but a dog here is the same as a horse. To tell the truth, back home in Barnaul a horse is cheaper. And a good lead-dog costs a fortune. They pay five polar foxes for one, and a polar fox is worth forty rubles. Figure it out for yourself. But I guess you know all about it yourself."

"Well, that's fine!" Los said, eyeing the militiaman's wife. "What's her name?"

"They call her Tayurintina, but I've changed it to Tanya. What are you waiting for, Tanya? Let's have some tea. . . . Or would you like some venison soup first, Comrade Revcom Representative?"

"I've been living on tea for twelve days on the trail. Make it soup. . . . How are you off for food?"

"Pretty well off. I've been down to Rusakov's trading post."

"How's he working?"

"Fine, Comrade Revcom Representative. He looks after everything there—the trading and the hunting. Lives like in a city apartment. His wife's a splendid woman—she's opened a school there, teaching five youngsters. She infected me, she did. When I got back I started teaching my Tanya to read and write. I'm not much of a teacher though! Still, we've gone through the whole alphabet already. . . ."

The polog was small, but clean, warm and light. All around lay fluffy reindeer skins, like rugs. The fur walls and ceiling were covered with cotton print. Photographs of the militiaman in various poses hung pinned on a side wall. One of them showed him as a boy astride a wooden horse with a sword.

. Outside the wind howled. A blizzard was breaking. Los enjoyed his first real meal since he had left the Revcom.

"Where d'you get this bread?" he asked, pointing to a small loaf.

"I've learned the trick of baking it in a saucepan over the burner. When the bottom's done I switch it over and give it another turn. Brought back some yeast from Rusakov. I've taught all the folks in the place the trick. They're all eating bread now. There's tons of flour here, real good wheat. A fellow gets as much as five poods for a polar fox, and he goes and bakes it in a saucepan. That's nothing! They started making homebrew out of flour—leaven it, undo the barrel of a Winchester, use it instead of coil pipe, and the stuff trickles out. I put a stop to it though—a waste of good flour."

The militiaman turned to his wife. "Let's have some coffee, Tanya. I've become a regular coffee fiend here. Have it first thing on getting up. With condensed milk, the real thing."

"I see you've fixed yourself up snug here, eh?"

"Fine, Comrade Revcom Representative. It's a bit crowded, and at first it was the devil of a job getting used to sitting on your own legs. But then even animals, I hear, can be taught to do all kinds of stunts."

"Never mind, Khokhlov, we'll get a house down here for you too. Only treat her nicely, this Tanya of yours."

"We're getting along fine."

The militiaman smiled and drew his wife to him with his huge paw.

"How about the smuggling?"

"The only sight I got of smugglers since the autumn was one tub of a schooner far out as sea. Would you like to take a stroll, Comrade Revcom Representative?"

"Thanks, old boy, but I walked so much on this trip that what I want is to lie down and get some sleep."

"Lie down, then, and I'll spend the night with the neighbours. This place won't hold all of us."

"In that case better let me go."

"Goodness no, Comrade Revcom Representative! It's none too clean in their yarangs, you know."

Los was accustomed to all sorts of conditions, but he felt loath to leave the militiaman's dwelling.

Khokhlov said to his wife:

"Tanya, go to the old man's to sleep."

Los slept like a log all night. He woke up in the morning to find the militiaman turning the handle of a meat grinder pressed between his knees. Tatyana was baking meat patties.

"Well, this is how we get along, Comrade Revcom Representative," the militiaman said gaily.

Los' blue eyes laughed and his face grew amazingly gentle.

Khokhlov had had such an overpowering desire to talk that he could not sleep a wink all night. He now reported at length about his activities while he sat turning the handle of the grinder.

"I say, Khokhlov, why didn't you give any news of yourself? To tell you the truth, I was getting worried about you."

"What a thing to worry about, Comrade Revcom Representative! Nothing'll happen to me. As to reporting, well, you see, I was collecting all kinds of data for a substantial report, and I've already started writing it. There's all kinds of goings on here. Tanya told me, for example, that there's some Russians living at the mouth of some river or other. I went out to investigate. Five days' ride from here. About twelve kilometres from the mouth of the river. Rode out on my dog team. Blizzard blowing. No human habitations anywhere. I got a bit scared at first. Then I see a dog team running towards me. It stopped. Great husky dogs—like wolves. A man

got off the sledge. A Russian face looked out of the furs. Started talking—it was a woman. ‘Where are you going?’ I says. ‘To examine the traps,’ she says. ‘Go down to the mouth of the river, you’ll find a dugout there. My husband’s at home. I’ll soon be back.’ Yelled at the dogs and was off in a flash. Swallowed up in the snowstorm. You could have knocked me over with a feather. Anyway, I went. I had a hell of a time finding that dugout. Every way you turned was just snow and snow, on all four sides of you. Couldn’t make anything out. I hit on it at last—by the smoke. The dugout was buried in the snow with only the chimney sticking out. I went in. The woman was back already—a plump lady. Her hubby was a shrimp of a guy, shaved and prinked out in American garb. Could tell by the way he talked that he was a man of education.”

“Wait a minute, what’s all this? Did you dream it, old boy?” Los asked.

“You just listen further, Comrade Revcom Representative.... The dugout was made of driftwood. He told me there was a sea current in that place. During the spring floods on the big rivers trees are washed away. They’re carried out to sea, and the current throws ’em up here. These logs come all the way from the Lena, from Kolyma and from the American Yukon. Different varieties from different places. Well, everything in that dugout was made of driftwood—the table, benches, everything. The stove was made out of a big barrel, also cast up by the sea. I found barrels like that myself on the seashore. There’s seven of ’em standing there now with gasoline and alcohol and kerosene. The local folk don’t use them, have no need for them.... Well, so they fussed around me, made me sit down and treated me.... ‘Are you long from the Mainland?’ the husband asks me. ‘Not so long,’ I says. ‘Did you ever hear anything there about the law of fatigue in metals?’ ‘What’s that?’ I asks.

'Some new decree?' And would you believe it, that chap tried to sell me a pup—says that metal is just the same as a living organism, it gets tired and when its time comes it cracks up without any reason, just like that. He used to work in some laboratory or other, and he says they sent him all kinds of fragments from the theatre of military operations for him to find that law of fatigue. 'Who will you be?' I asks him. 'An engineer,' he says, 'and my wife's a doctor. We now go in for trapping polar foxes.' Well, I thought, here are some birds for you! I didn't know how to talk to 'em. Anyway, I says, 'Permit me, as the local authority, to register you.' "

The militiaman turned to his wife: "Get me my case, Tanya."

Los lay on his stomach, propped up on his elbows, and listened attentively to the militiaman's story, his immense forehead puckered.

Khokhlov consulted his notebook.

"Their name's not Russian: Sabler, Vadim Petrovich, and the missus' name is Valentina Yurievna. See what rum fish we have in these parts, Comrade Revcom Representative? I only discovered 'em thanks to Tanya, otherwise I'd never know about them."

"Where on earth did they come from?" Los asked in astonishment.

"That's just what I asked 'em. He spun me a yarn about it the whole evening. Said the tsar before the war issued an ukase for the building of radio stations in this area. Ten or twelve of 'em, I'm not sure. Then the war broke out and this here ukase fell through. Still, in 1916 they decided to build one station in Kolyma. Sabler built it. After the Revolution he had a row with somebody there and decided to chuck the job. Bought some dogs, dumped his missus into a sledge and rode up the coast. Covered over two thousand kilometres. Came to this here delta, took a fancy to the place and settled her here. 'I

never knew a better life than I'm living here,' he says. 'Nobody bosses me and I boss nobody.' Why shouldn't he live well? He has everything he wants. He and his wife trap a hundred and fifty or so foxes during the winter, and in the summer they lay away a stock of fish, mushrooms and berries. And that's the way they live, all by themselves. But I says to myself: there's more to this than meets the eye. Maybe they're looking for some kind of metal? Not a dog visits the place in the summer. Absolutely deserted. As for products, I guess they're supplied by American schooners. But he's bad off for products this year. True, he told me, 'I don't need products, if it comes to that. I can live on reindeer meat and fish, like the nomads.' But there's something fishy about the business. If you ask me, he's hiding something."

"You'll have to go and look them up again, Comrade Khokhlov. Tell him to come down to the Revcom without fail. But not before a couple of months. I want to see him myself."

"I will, Comrade Revcom Representative. But he's not the only bird. I haven't nosed it out yet, but I've struck the trail. There's an American living on the bank of another river, far away from here, almost in the hills. He used to live there only in the summer. Came out in a motorboat in the spring and left in the autumn. But this winter, it seems, he has remained there. So rumour says. I'll have to take a trip down there too, and find out what's what."

"Yes," Los said. "Bear in mind, Comrade Khokhlov, that we've got to turn all the adventurers and imposers out of here this year, or next year at the latest."

"We'll ferret them all out, Comrade Revcom Representative. . . . This other guy seems to go by the name of Mister Nick."

The blizzard dropped the next day, and Los rode out with Khokhlov to visit Rusakov at the fur-trading post.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The manager of the fur-trading post, Rusakov, a brisk man of short stature with a pointed reddish little beard and light eyes, hailed from Penza Gubernia.

When a boy Rusakov had gone out with his father, a landless peasant, as settlers to Siberia. Here, in this new country, he threw himself passionately into the pursuit of hunting and trapping fur-bearing animals. He roamed about the Siberian taiga for months at a stretch and gained a reputation as a crack hunter while still a youth. He attracted the attention of the Siberian fur merchant Babkin, who offered him a job. In the course of a few years Rusakov became a leading fur specialist.

The merchant decided to make Rusakov his son-in-law, to give him the hand of his only daughter. A big business career lay ahead of Rusakov.

All this might have come about had not the merchant learned that his future son-in-law was associating with white-ticket convicts, as he called the revolutionaries in exile. The merchant felt that Rusakov had got entangled in this nasty business too, and fired him. Rusakov went off into the taiga to track down animals again.

He was a partisan during the Civil War, fought the interventionists and on several occasions fell into the clutches of the Japanese who manhandled him and cut strips of skin off his back. He always managed, however, to give the enemy the slip. As a result of the agonizing tortures and sufferings he underwent, Rusakov developed a stammer. Life now found him at the uttermost edge of the world, following his favourite pursuit.

An old Communist, Rusakov was a hard-working man. When he wasn't busy in the store or the warehouses he conversed in the yarangs with the hunters and trappers, discussing ways of organizing and im-

proving hunting. With such an impediment as his stammer and ignorance of the language it was very difficult for him to carry on conversation.

A perfect knowledge of the hunter's life and psychology, however, helped him to win the affections of the local people. Rusakov was not averse to eating their food, and they gladly regaled him with walrus meat and the choicest chunks of young seal, thereby expressing the high esteem in which they held him. They considered him a real man.

Here in the Far North, where time was long, Rusakov did not have enough of it. He came home only to take a bite and have a good sleep. Fearing that his wife would be bored to death he persuaded her to open a school for the children of the local hunters and trappers at the trading-post house.

Someone spread a rumour that unless the children were allowed to go to school, Rusakov would get offended and would stop selling cartridges and tobacco. The result was a good school attendance. Anna Ivanovna, a portly, good-natured Russian woman, who had never dreamt of becoming a schoolteacher, found herself teaching the Russian language and reading and writing to Chukchi children. The children quickly took to this kindly white-faced woman and ran to school eagerly.

When Los came to the trading post Anna Ivanovna was engaged with her pupils. Ten little boys and girls sat round the dining table. On the table lay a primer whose presence at the trading post was an unsolved mystery.

On the wall hung a large square of a well-dressed walrus skin framed by wooden laths and used as a black-board. Some figures and words were chalked on it.

Anna Ivanovna was thrown into blushing confusion when Los came into the room. She shook hands with him, then said to the children:

"Well, children, no more lessons today."

"Why?" said Los. "Please go on."

"I can't teach in front of strangers, Nikita Sergeyevich. I don't even let my husband come in when I'm giving lessons."

"My, what strict rules!" Los remarked with a smile. He sat down next to one of the pupils and peered into his homemade, neatly-sewn copybook of common paper.

"What figure is this?" he said in a deep-chested bass.

"Eight," the boy answered confidently, eyeing this huge bearlike man with curiosity.

"And this one?"

The boy glanced at his teacher and answered irresolutely:

"Six."

"Come, Ako, have you forgotten?" Anna Ivanovna said.

"Quite right. If you turn the copybook upside down it makes six," Los said encouragingly. "Now read this word."

"'Mamma,'" the boy spelt out firmly.

"Fine! Quite right. And can you write? Write the word 'papa.' "

The boy wrote out the word in a firm hand.

"You're a good scholar!" Los said approvingly.

Anna Ivanovna nevertheless dismissed the pupils. Rusakov and the militiaman Khokhlov came into the room. Shortly they all sat down to dinner.

"Now I can feel at home in this place—the Russian spirit is here," Los said with pride. "Last year I sat in this very room with that red-headed Olsen. And both of us were saying things we didn't mean. Awfully sly we were."

"I'm r-r-red-headed too," Rusakov put in with a laugh.

"So it's not much of a change," Anna Ivanovna said as she ladled out the soup.

"It's a big change, a very big change, Anna Ivanovna. By the way, hand me in an application and I'll enroll you on the staff as a teacher."

Anna Ivanovna threw up her hands. "Goodness, Nikita Sergeyevich! I haven't got the right to be a teacher. I'm just teaching for lack of anything else to do."

"Now we have all the rights, Anna Ivanovna. Write an application without fail. And if you start a class for illiterates besides, I'll hand you a special expression of gratitude in the name of the Revcom. You've started a grand thing here. Ten pupils!"

After dinner Los and Rusakov went to see the warehouses and the store.

"Well, Los, the Am-m-mericans d-d-diddled me after all."

"Did they?"

"T-t-to-bacco's a salable line. It was in good condition. I d-d-didn't have the cheek to c-c-class it as unsalable goods. Lost t-t-twenty per cent on it. That makes t-t-ten thousand rubles in gold currency."

"Why is it unsalable?"

"I brought papusha down—Cherkassy leaf tobacco. I knew how fond the S-s-siberians were of it. S-s-sells like hot cakes here. The hunters d-d-don't want to look at the American plug tobacco. Won't have anything but papusha."

The store was well stocked with merchandise, American and Russian. In the fur warehouse hung batches of foxes. Los made a long inspection of the warehouses and evinced a keen interest in the work of the trading post and the hunting.

When they came back into the room Los asked Anna Ivanovna to make tea.

"It's not for me—I'm going to have a visitor," he said with a wink.

The visitor Los was expecting was old "One-Eye" from across the ravine.

The militiaman offered to go and fetch him but Los said:

"Let Rusakov go. The fellow will think I want to scare him with the militia. What's his name?"

"Liok," Rusakov answered. "You think I didn't t-t-tackle him, Los? I did. S-s-simply won't listen. I speak to him about motors and whaleboats, and he pulls out a box of Trakoda matches, strikes them, and they don't b-b-burn. I couldn't get any farther with him. Then I tackle him from another angle, and again he gets onto those matches. Pulls out a fistful of American matches, lights one, b-b-b-blows on the flame, and it keeps on burning. 'These are matches,' he says."

Los was surprised. "Really?"

"I'd hang that s-s-son-of-a-bitch of a match factory d-d-director—" Rusakov glanced at his wife and then added, "by the ear. He's ho-ho-holding up our work. Helping our enemies. After that just try talking to 'One-Eye.' "

"I like this 'One-Eye' of yours," Los said. "Very much. And I'll do something about those matches. You go and fetch him. We must tear him away from Alitet at all cost. I'll break up that friendship."

"I'll go, of c-c-course, if you insist on it. But you'll draw a blank just the same. I know him inside out."

"You just go and call him. But don't tell him what we want him for. Just say, 'The big Russian chief wants to see you.' "

Rusakov went, and Los started pacing the room with a joyous smile.

"It's good here, Anna Ivanovna! I don't feel like going away. See what one Soviet family can do? I might not have noticed it if I hadn't remembered last year's

Americans. You learn things by comparison, Anna Ivanovna."

"Life's interesting out here. At first, though, I was afraid I'd die of boredom. Now I've become so attached to these youngsters that I can't imagine life without them. They're so earnest and dutiful. When I dismiss them I sit down at once preparing for the next day's lessons. It's hard, you know, Nikita Sergeyevich, having to work out teaching methods all by yourself. I'm no schoolteacher. I don't think it's right if you haven't got the license."



"Goodness, Anna Ivanovna! You just forget about 'licenses.' Worrying about that will only interfere with your work. Have more confidence in yourself!" Los said, waving his arm. "When I came here I didn't have any experience or know the life either. But now I know it all well enough. You'll make an excellent schoolteacher, Anna Ivanovna. The important thing is to want to be one."

Rusakov came back followed by a tall, sturdy, one-eyed old man—Liok. He wore a comfortable, well-made fur parka of fine reindeer calfskin, and his whole person looked trim and well set up. His shrewd single eye alighted on Los with the ghost of an amused twinkle.

Los held his hand out in a matter-of-fact way and greeted him as an old acquaintance:

"How do you do, Liok!"

A faint smile of amusement flitted across the old man's face again.

"Sit down to the table. Will you have tea with me?"

"I have just come from tea. But I can have some of yours too," Liok said, sitting down on a chair.

Los picked up the teapot and kettle.

"Do you like it strong?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," the old man answered with a blink of his solitary eye.

Los sat facing him. He sipped his tea and opened the conversation.

"I have come to see how you folks are living here."

"We live as we've always lived. You saw it last winter, didn't you?" Liok said unhurriedly.

"Last year is one thing, this year maybe there is some change, eh?"

"No, there is no change. The birds are still flying, the foxes running about and walruses swimming—everything the same it was last year. The blizzard is blowing just the same, hear it?"

"So there are no changes? Well, I've come down here to have a talk with you."

The old man put down his cup, and looking Los straight in the face, he said:

"Just the same, I won't join the artel."

"I know you won't. But there is a change after all. Last year there wasn't an artel on this side of the ravine, and now there is. In the spring, as soon as the water opens, I shall send them a whaleboat with a motor."

"When the walrus comes I shall hunt it without a motor."

"Quite right. But you can do it quicker with a motor. A motor, Liok, helps to improve life, to remake it."

"You want to remake life?"

"Yes," Los answered firmly.

"But how can you remake it? You Russians have not learned to make matches."

The old man reached inside his breast and brought out a Trakoda box. Without saying a word he struck a match. It did not light. He handed Los the box.

"Yes, they're rotten matches," Los confirmed in disgust.

"And you want to remake life?" Liok's tone was reproachful. "These American matches burn in the wind."

"Why do you harp on matches all the time, Liok? As though matches were everything. You tell me this: what kind of tobacco do you smoke?"

The old man fixed his eye on Los in silence.

"Come now, show me your pouch!"

Reluctantly the old man reached inside his breast. When Los saw that the pouch contained papusha he laid a plug of American tobacco on the table.

"Why don't you smoke this kind?"

"Papusha is stronger," the old man replied. He was silent for a while. "Without tobacco," he said, "life is hard for a man; without fire it is impossible. Anyway, I won't go into the artel. Let men live the way they want to. The folks on this side wanted to go into the artel—all right. I say nothing."

"I am not compelling you to join the artel, am I?"

"You're not compelling me, but you want me to."

"I do, Liok, and I think there'll come a time when you'll ask to be taken in. And then the people will think whether they should take you in or not."

"They won't think at all, they'll take me at once if I wish it."

"Will you have some more tea?"

"Pour some out."

While pouring the tea, Los said:

"All right, Liok, let's leave this subject for the time being. You'll see for yourself when spring comes."

"I know what will happen in the spring. I shall have more walruses than anyone else."

"We'll see, life will show."

The old man got up. "I'm going home," he said. "I must make a bidarka."

"Well, good-bye then, Liok. Come and pay me a visit."

"Pay you a visit? All right," he said.

When he had gone the militiaman said:

"There's an old fizgig for you! But it looks like there's going to be an artel on the other side."

"Absolutely," Los corroborated. "I'll look him up again this evening in his yarang."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Great changes had taken place of late in the Loren settlement. Neither Charles Thompson's shanty nor the corrugated iron stores were any longer to be seen.

Rultyna had no use for these structures, and she told Yarak:

"They are an eyesore all the time. They should be broken up."

Rultyna wanted nothing to remind her of her white husband.

All the material went into building a yarang on the hillside, there where all people lived, and not on the beach.

The yarang stood shining with an iron roof, and Rultyna lived in peace with her children, like all people. Life seemed to have begun anew.

In addition to the former American trading post of Mr. Simons in which Zhohov was now the boss, two new houses had sprung up in the settlement—a school and the Red Cross hospital.

The yarangs of the local hunters stood on the hillside, as before, but Rynteu's travellers' yarang was no longer among them. Soon after old Rynteu fell over a precipice and was killed, his daughter married a hunter from a neighbouring settlement. All that now remained

of Rynteu's yarang was the circular stone-lined foundation; the bones of sea animals and an abandoned sooty burner jutted out of the snow. The home-fire of that yarang was extinguished forever. And the daughter had gone to another fireside.

Yarak and Mary moved into the trading-post house. They slept on the bed on which Charlie himself had slept, and ate at the table at which Mr. Simons had eaten. In general, they lived the life of Tangs.

Rultyna came often to see them, and by force of old habit looked after the white man's house and tidied up for them. Rultyna knew how such houses were run. It amazed her how quickly Yarak and Mary had taken to the white man's ways. She was not entirely sure, however, that they felt more comfortable that way. They probably put up with this new life because Yarak was working in the trading post and Mary in the hospital. Ah well, let them live this new way if they wanted to.

Next door, on the other side of the wall, lived Zhohov, the manager of the fur-trading post. He snored heavily at night, and Mary, laughing, would say to Yarak, "The walrus has climbed out onto the shore."

This was very funny, for Zhohov greatly resembled a walrus: he had just as fat a belly, the same drooping moustache, and he bellowed like one.

Every morning Mary made coffee and served Yarak breakfast just as though it were Charlie sitting at the table. They were always gay and lighthearted, talked in loud voices and wore cloth clothes. Mary filled out and began to look quite like a white-faced woman. And despite the fact that Yarak rarely went sea hunting, and then mostly for sport, they always had food in the house. Yarak didn't trap foxes, yet he bought no less goods than the best hunters. And Mary, too, often got money from the doctor for which she could buy any of the goods in the trading post.

All this gave Rultyna no little cause for wonder. She did not go about with a stoop as she had in Charlie's time, but with a straightened back and raised head. Bertha would come rushing in from school bubbling with news about the lessons. "The school is of no use," Rultyna thought, "but let her have a good time while she's still little."

The settlement seemed to have awakened to a strange new life.

One morning Rultyna came to visit her pregnant daughter. Yarak presided at the table, waiting for his coffee. And when Mary served the cup of steaming coffee, Yarak suddenly banged his fist on the table and roared in perfect imitation of Charlie:

"Goddam! Why is the coffee cold?!"

And all of them, Rultyna, Mary and Yarak, burst out laughing.

Yarak drank his coffee, capped it with a chunk of seal meat, and set out for his fur warehouse. Mary went to the hospital. Rultyna started to tidy up.

There were many polar fox skins in the warehouse, and all of them Yarak was the master of until the steamer arrived. He hummed a little song to himself as he cleaned the pelts. Yarak knew well that he mustn't leave any spots of fat on the skins, even though they were dry. When summer came the fat would melt and make the fur yellowish, whereas it should be white as snow. It was about this that Yarak hummed his little song.

Zhohov came into the warehouse. He wore a rich fur coat of reindeer calfskin with two otter skins for a collar. On his head was a beaver hat.

"Good morning!" Yarak said cheerily.

Zhohov walked down the line of hanging pelts in silence, shook the skins out by the tails, then said drily:

"Pack them up in bags and I'll seal each package."

"What for?" Yarak said in surprise. "Let them hang. It is better for them. We'll have plenty of time to put them in bags when we see the steamer at sea. We'll make a draught and air them."

"Are you trying to teach me the fur business?" Zhohov demanded. "You're a snotty nose yet! I had enormous warehouses in Krasnoyarsk. I've been in this business twenty-five years."



Yarak pulled a polar fox pelt off the line, turned the skin inside out and said:

"Look, Zhohov, there's fat on the flesh side. The trappers are not used to dressing the skins properly. They have no bran to do it with. I always cleaned the pelts with bran in Charlie's time. Charlie knew how the pelts had to be looked after. Rultyna cleaned them too, so did Mary—we all cleaned them."

"Go to hell with your Charlie! I know better than Charlie what I have to do. Drop that bran and do as you're told."

Yarak in his agitation ruffled his thick mop of hair which he wore brushed down in the Russian way, and said:

"I guess the furs will spoil like that, Zhohov. Charlie said that if such skins get into the ship's hold they will melt there. It's warm in the hold. The fat will stain the fur. The pelts will grow yellow."

"Do what I tell you. Give the women an order to sew sacks. We'll start packing this whole lot."

"Just as you please. I wanted to clean them first and then hang them out in the open air. The rime will settle on the skins and they will be white as snow!"

"Do as I told you! Order the sacks!" Zhohov snapped and went out.

Yarak stood staring at the door through which Zhohov had disappeared.

"He's a wrong man," Yarak said with a sigh, and went to the yarangs to speak to the women.

As he went his thoughts were on the pelts. Outside one of the yarangs he met the doctor.

"Well, red merchant, how's business?" Pyotr Petrovich asked good-humouredly.

"Business is good, only a little bad," Yarak answered, and told the doctor about his talk with Zhohov.

The doctor became interested. He asked Yarak many questions about furs and the way they should be treated and stored. Snow was falling, but they still stood talking and talking.

Zhohov sat at his desk counting on the abacus and writing down figures when the doctor came in.

"Hello, Naum Isidorovich! We live in the same place and see so little of each other."

"It's all for the best, Doctor. Less in each other's way," Zhohov growled.

"Look here, my good man. I've just had a chat with Yarak. He's told me some very interesting things about furs.... He's displeased with the order you've given."

Zhohov laid aside his abacus and peered at the doctor over his spectacles.

"I don't care a hang whether he's pleased or not," he let fall indifferently. "You listen more to what he tells you. Maybe you'll teach him to become a talebearer."

The doctor paced nervously up and down the room.

"Excuse me! This is not a case of talebearing. There's sense in what he says about handling furs."

Zhohov burst out laughing; his hands rose and fell on his quivering stomach.

"Look here, Doctor—you're an educated man, yet you don't want to understand that he's still a savage," Zhohov said disdainfully. "I've spent a quarter of a century in

the fur business. D'you expect me to start taking lessons from him now? Pshaw, let's drop the subject!"

The doctor puffed at his cigarette and eyed Zhohov sternly.

"I'm far from considering Yarak a savage," he said. "I'll say more—I'm convinced he's right. I simply can't make out why you don't want to accept his sound and reasonable advice. You can't pack the furs away until Yarak has cleaned the fat off them."

"If you please, Doctor," Zhohov flared up. "I'm in charge of this here trading post! OKARO sent me out on this job and not you. And I'm responsible for the trading post. So I'll ask you to please mind your own business. I don't poke my nose into your hospital and teach you how to treat people. The sick, by the way, don't want to go to you either. That's something you ought to give your attention to."

The doctor was silent. Spots of colour flamed in his cheeks and his lower lip quivered. He got up and walked to the door without a word.

"Nosybody!" Zhohov shouted after him.

The doctor all but ran to the hospital simmering with anger. He had never been so provoked in all the time he had lived in the North. As it was he chafed under his enforced idleness. All the measures he had taken in cooperation with the teacher yielded no results. People simply refused to come to the hospital. The only patient he had had was a boy, whom he had treated for the itch.

The doctor came to a stop on the hospital porch and gripped the banisters, breathing heavily.

"What are you standing here for, Doctor," Mary asked solicitously, seeing how upset he looked.

"That's all right, Mary. I'll soon come in. I must go and see the teacher."

The teacher Kuzma Dozorny stood by the stove frying reindeer meat.

"That you, Doctor? Come in. We'll soon have some venison," he said genially.

The doctor went up to a homemade little bookcase, glanced cursorily at the book backs and sat down on a chair.

The teacher's little room was clean and snug. There was a homemade little sofa covered with reindeer skins. Reindeer skins lay next to the bed and by the writing desk. The doctor seemed to be seeing this for the first time, and he thought, "Nice place you have, Kuzma."

The teacher came in with a sizzling frying pan.

"You're looking as black as an autumn cloud, Doctor. What is it?"

"You know, Kuzma, that huckster has hurt my feelings deeply. Sank a knife right into my heart. I lost my temper and just managed to keep from landing him one on the jaw."

"To hell with him! Don't pay any attention to him, Pyotr Petrovich. Let's have some of this A-1 venison. It melts in your mouth."

"Kuzma, do me a favour. Take a walk over to my place. You'll find a bottle in the cupboard. Fetch it. I need it now as medicine."

The teacher quickly ran the errand. On the way he picked up a big frozen fish.

"My neighbour brought in a whole sledge of fish. Loach. I'll have it ready in a twinkling."

The teacher held the fish head down on the table and began to cut wafer-thin slices off it with a sharp knife. The slices curled into a plate. When sprinkled with pepper they were extraordinarily tasty.

After a drink and a bite the doctor said:

"This sliced fish makes an excellent snack... Well, Kuzma, I called on that storekeeper to talk something over with him—and the state he worked me up into!"

"What's there to talk over with him? I call on him

once a month. And now I'm thinking of buying a tub of butter and a sack of sugar and putting them in my entranceway, and never seeing him again."

The doctor told him about the furs. The teacher suggested writing to the Revcom about it.

"No," the doctor said. "Not just now. They say Los hasn't come back yet. Somebody else may come down from the Revcom who won't be able to knock sense into the fellow's head. We need Los to handle this."

After a pause the doctor asked:

"Perhaps I really am an idler, Kuzma, eh? You're working in the school, he's working, too, at the trading post, while I'm just killing time. It gets on my nerves. What do you say?"

"Don't worry, Doctor. Things will come square. Let's have some venison."

They sat together until late in the evening.

From the trading post came women carrying burlap to sew into sacks.

"The people haven't caught on to the storekeeper yet," the teacher said. "They count him the main person here."

"I know. Mary's told me about his talks with the hunters. He tries to drive home the idea that they can get along without the school and without the hospital but not without him and his goods. See the line he's taking? He's a harmful person. A spouting demagogue!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Halcyon, sunny days set in. The Arctic night was coming to an end, but spring was a long way off yet. A south wind had been blowing for several days. The ice broke away from the coast, baring a strip of open water all along the shore. The air was warm, and the snow sparkled in the sun.

Los came back from his trip. Even before going into the house he stopped to talk with the instructor Osipov as he stood by his dog team. Los proposed that he take advantage of the open water and leave immediately for the northern coast on two whaleboats.

"You'll deliver one whaleboat to Rusakov and the other to Dvorkin the teacher. Stay there until the spring and train a motorist in each settlement. It wouldn't be bad for Rusakov and the teacher to learn the trade too."

"What if ice forms on the whaleboats on the way, Nikita Sergeyevich?"

"That's nothing. You'll chop off the ice. Take axes along. Getting there won't be easy, but it can be done."

"Good. I'm ready to set out today. But what's that on your cheek?"

"A touch of frostbite. What's new here?"

"A telegram from Andrei Zhukov. Funds have been assigned for building a cultural service base. He's been appointed head of the base."

"Good work, Andrei old boy!" Los exclaimed.

Ilyusha Molodtsov came running up to the sledge.

"Welcome home, Nikita Sergeyevich! What have you stopped out here for? Drive down to the radio station. I've fixed you up a cot there. Everybody has moved into the yarangs."

"Yes, we've practically run out of coal," Osipov said.

"Thanks, Ilyusha, but I'll fix up at Ilyich's place. Remove the cot and put my desk in its place."

"We'll find room for both cot and desk, Nikita Sergeyevich."

"No, no," Los said emphatically.

"We're heating only the accountant's room," Osipov said. "He's come down with scurvy: legs and gums are swollen."

"What brought him down? Bad temper? Or too much sleep? Spring isn't here yet, and scurvy's a spring disease."

"We wanted to send him to the hospital but he wouldn't go."

"No need to. I'll cure him myself right on the spot." Los untied a sack from the sledge, threw it on his shoulder and marched off to visit the accountant.

The accountant lay in bed, pale and unshaven. He glanced up apathetically as Los entered.

"Fallen ill, accountant?"

"Yes, Nikita Sergeyevich."

"The coal doesn't help?"

The accountant sighed. "This place'll be the end of me."

"Of course it will. Just wait—soon your teeth will start falling out."

"You're a spiteful man, Nikita Sergeyevich."

Los produced a chunk of frozen seal flesh from the sack.

"Here, eat this. Chew it while you still have your teeth."

"What d'you mean, Nikita Sergeyevich! What am I, a Chukchi? I can't eat that."

"I order you to eat it!" Los commanded, raising his voice. "If you haven't the courage to eat it by yourself then let's do it together." He sat down on the edge of the accountant's bed and started on the meat.

The accountant took a piece, unwillingly, and turned it this way and that with a grimace.

"It's the most radical treatment for scurvy. There's no comparing you with Amundsen, yet he ate this kind of meat without turning an eyelash. In every yarang the Chukchi told me about it with admiration. They like it when you don't turn up your nose at their food. It's an excellent antiscorbutic. I know that first-hand. When I

came down with the scurvy last year this was the only thing that saved me."

"You know, it really isn't bad," the accountant muttered as he chewed the frozen meat.

Radio operator Molodtsov came in.

"Nikita Sergeyevich, a man has just come by the name of Sabler—wants to see you."

"Ah, Sabler? Invite him to the radio station. I'll soon be over."

It was evening. A bright lamp burned at the radio station. Sabler examined the apparatus closely.

"Does the station work well?" he asked Molodtsov.

"Yes. I'm in regular communication with Petropavlovsk," Molodtsov answered proudly.

Sabler became talkative, and his speech was interspersed with technical terms.

"Do you know radio engineering?" Molodtsov asked in surprise.

"I used to," Sabler answered with a trace of irony.

Los came in and sat down at the radio operator's table.

Sabler got up. "Good evening."

"Good evening, Citizen Sabler," Los said, closely examining the little man with the birdlike face covered with a dense growth of black stubble.

"Sit down."

"I am a local hunter and have come here on your request."

Los eyed him narrowly.

"I understand you're an engineer, not a hunter."

"I was an engineer in the past, now I'm a hunter."

"Are you related to Sabler, the chief procurator of the Holy Synod?"

"No, just a namesake. . . . May I take my things off?"

"Please do."

Sabler removed his fur hood, drew off his light reindeer calfskin parka over his head and hung it on a nail

with an air of studied nonchalance. He leisurely smoothed down his long ruffled hair and resumed his seat on the bench. His eyes shifted uneasily. His pointed little beard stuck out from his face, and there was a sort of ferine alertness in all his figure.

"Are you really an engineer?"

"Yes," Sabler answered hastily.

"What if I asked to see your diploma?"

"I burnt it. A fur hunter needs a trap, not a diploma."

"And is your wife a doctor?"

"She was."

"What made you give up such fine professions and choose the rough life of hunters?"

"We are perfectly content with our life here. More—we are happy. We like the open spaces and absolute independence. Nobody bosses me. . . . We don't want to live in a society where people fight each other like hungry wolves. . . . Our life here, if you want to know, is real freedom. That's the attraction which the North holds for myself and my wife," the engineer said, pulling out his pipe.

"Are you aware that a new, socialist society is now being built on the territory of the former Russian empire and that the wolfish laws have been abolished and men's relations are being established on entirely new principles?"

"I heard about it. . . . But that's all in the future. I'm fifty, and I want to enjoy my freedom now."

"Pardon me, it's not the future, it's present-day reality."

Ilyusha sat listening to the conversation in silence. He eyed this odd man with curiosity.

"Quaint, I call it," Los said. "A doctor and an engineer withdraw from society to engage in hunter's pursuits."

"The hunter's philosophy is very simple—he kills an animal and is satiated. I fully share that way of life."

"But you worked before the Revolution, didn't you?"

Los suddenly shouted. "You were interested in the phenomenon of fatigue in metals? Why did you lose interest in all this after the Revolution?"

"Yes, I worked. And I'm very sorry that I came to my present way of life so late."

Los nervously began smoking. He lost all desire for carrying on the conversation. Recovering himself, he asked in a level tone:

"Does your wife give medical assistance to the local population?"

"No. She has come to the conclusion that the human organism should not be interfered with. It is a sufficiently perfect mechanism to cope with disease without outside aid. Medicine, in her opinion, is quackery, like shamanism."

"That's interesting. Well, and say a leg has to be amputated? The organism can't do that for him."

"She considers that a man without a leg is not a man. He shouldn't be deceived with the illusion of happiness."

"A queer philosophy yours is."

"Every man's his own philosopher."

There was a pause. Sabler handed Los a letter.

"Your geologist asked me to give you this," he said.

Los took the envelope. It was a makeshift wrapper sewn down with thread in many places. He examined it carefully, then cut the threads with a razor blade. He read the letter and then reread it, stealing occasional glances at Sabler, who sat in silence.

"Did you read this letter?" Los suddenly asked.

"I?" Sabler said in a surprised tone. "What do you take me for? I never read other people's letters—"

"I take your word for it," Los interjected.

"Not to mention the fact that it doesn't interest me in the least," the engineer added.

"Well, look here, Citizen Sabler. I want you and your wife to come to the Revcom about a month before navigation starts. I must send you to the Mainland."

"May I ask you what I have done to earn this exile?" Sabler asked in an unruffled tone, as though he had been fully prepared for this.

"I have reasons which you will learn when you arrive here with your wife. That's that. And don't try to evade my order. The militiaman Khokhlov will bring you here. You may now go back."

The engineer rose, put on his parka and, holding his fur hood in his hand, said:

"It's night now. May I sleep over in the settlement and leave in the morning?"

"You may."

The engineer departed. Los sat staring at the closed door for a long time.

"Damned weasel!" Los said. "Thinks he can get around me with that exotic philosophy of his!"

"What is it, Nikita Sergeyevich?" the radio operator asked.

"The geologist writes that American schooners visit this 'philosopher.' He even found a motor in the tundra."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

As Ermen and the instructor Osipov prepared to push off the whaleboats, old Ilyich, Ermen's father, stood on the beach intently scanning the open sea. He turned round, peered up at the sky, and said:

"The south wind will blow four days. Then the ice will come back to the shore again. I think I had better go with you myself."

"Come along, Father," Ermen said. "Maybe we will meet with difficulties on the way. The return trip we will make by dog team. We will put two teams into the whaleboats."

"Wait," Ilyich said. "I will speak with old Komo."

The south wind had already driven the ice far from the coast; there remained only a fringe all along the shore. Here there was only a faint ripple, but in the distance there were already whitecaps on the sea. The sky hung low over sea and earth. The sun had not yet come up.

Old Ilyich returned dressed for the journey.

"Let us start," he said.

The whaleboat slid over the ice fringe into the water and was followed by the second one. The men began swiftly loading the dogs on board. The hunters carried them in their arms, like infants. The dogs whimpered.

The motors began throbbing, the sails were unfurled and the whaleboats set off down the coast.

Los stood on the beach watching them sail past. Ilyich sat at the rudder and kept a sharp lookout in front of him.

Los recalled how he had saved the old man from being strangled to death. "That's the way to act," he reflected with satisfaction. "These people have to be wrested from the tight grip of superstition, darkness and ignorance. And we, the Bolsheviks, will do it."

The whaleboats disappeared from view, and Los went back to Ilyich's yarang. It was crowded in the polog, despite the absence of two men. Los undressed, covered himself with a blanket and soon fell asleep.

In the morning Yarak came in. Ermen's wife treated him to breakfast. They sat picking seal bones, in anticipation of tea. Nobody spoke, so as not to disturb Los.

Against the other wall lay the children. The noise of the rustling roof could be heard from without. Los suddenly woke and lay listening to the sound.

"What wind is blowing?" he asked without turning over.

The woman laid aside the bone.

"A good wind," she answered quickly. "The Souther. The whaleboats are now far out. They run fast with motor and sail. You could not catch them on dogs."

Los turned over on his other side and saw the guest. Yarak was in a cloth shirt. He smiled and smoothed his hair.

"Yarak has come!" Los shouted joyfully, getting out of bed

"Yes, I have come. Help me again, Los," Yarak said.

"Has anything happened to Mary?"

"No. Nothing has happened to her. A little one was born. She is lying at the doctor's place. Everything is fine. Mary and Rultyna say the doctor is a splendid good man."

"Well, I congratulate you! But what is the matter?"

"The furs are going to ruin," Yarak answered in a low sad voice. "A lot of furs are going to ruin." And he slowly recounted his clash with Zhohov. "He has locked up the sacks with iron seals. That's the news," Yarak concluded.

"Bad news," Los said.

"Very bad. Zhohov is a wrong man. The doctor was angry with him too. He wrote you a letter, but I was in a hurry and forgot it."

"All right, Yarak. You have done very good to come down. You have brought important news. I shall ride out with you today to see Zhohov."

"Are you going hunting again, Los?" the woman said with a chuckle.

This constant travelling about was beginning to tire Los. It was no easy job to sit in a sledge for six, eight or ten hours at a stretch. He was frequently caught in a blizzard, and exposure to the cold was taxing his strength. Nevertheless he rode out with Yarak the same day.

They arrived in Loren settlement on the fifth night. Mary was still lying in the hospital. Yarak made the coffee himself. They had a bite and went to sleep.

Early the next morning Yarak ran off to the hospital to have a look at Mary and his new-born son. Zhohov

came into the room. He greeted Los, who was examining a primer, with a mixture of unctuous suavity and nervousness.

"How do you do, Nikita Sergeyevich. You're a rare guest in our parts."

"Yes, very rare—and that's very bad," Los answered.

"It is bad. Take Yarak, now—he's simply getting out of hand. Went away for over a week without even a by-your-leave. Took the keys with him, and I can't get into the warehouse. The furs have to be aired."

Los eyed him in silence: "Yes, that's no good," he said noncommittally.

"This insubordination was sown by instructor Osipov. Discipline and order is what they should be taught, Comrade Los, and not insubordination. They're a dark people. They should listen to us Russians, learn from us."

Zhohov sat down heavily. The chair creaked under him.

"But there are some things they can teach us..." Los said, circling about the little room.

"Of course. They know more, for example, about sealing."

"Zhohov, where did you work before? Before the Revolution."

"Me?... I worked in Krasnoyarsk. Was a furrier there twenty-five years. I was in Krasnoyarsk and Rusa-kov in Chita. We're big specialists. The OKARO called me out from Krasnoyarsk. The chairman of the board knows me well. A pal of mine," Zhohov stressed.

"Well, show me your trading post."

"With pleasure. Come right along."

They went into Zhohov's room. It was a spacious room even though it was encumbered with furniture. It contained a wardrobe, bed, sideboard, sofa, six chairs and Mr. Thompson's old rocking chair. The floor was carpeted with reindeer skins.

"Would you like a drop of coffee or some liqueur?" Zhohov asked.

"No. I don't want anything."

Los surveyed the room while Zhohov was dressing.

"This place looks like a furniture store. You live a bachelor's life, while Yarak, your subordinate and a married man, lives in an empty room, though he enjoys the same rights in your trading system as you do. Do you think that's right? I don't think it is. You ought to give him this here wardrobe or the sideboard and a couple of chairs."

"But they're not used to such things."

"It's hard to get used to what you haven't got. They'll get used to it all right. Well, let's go and see the store and warehouses."

Los found everything in perfect order in the store. They came to the fur warehouse.

"There, you see, a padlock. Yarak has the key."

"Send for him."

There was no need to, however. Yarak himself dashed up waving the key.

"What do you mean by running away without asking leave?" Zhohov demanded.

"I called him out to the Revcom on urgent business," Los said.

The warehouse was stacked high with sacks of furs, while about a thousand pelts still hung on lines.

"I hear your furs are not in order, not properly cleaned, eh?" Los said.

"That's just talk by people who don't understand what's what," Zhohov answered. "We know how to handle furs."

"This isn't just talk—Yarak himself has told me. He knows a thing or two about furs. Show me a couple of fox skins, Yarak."

Yarak swiftly pulled down a white fox. "Look, Los," he said, turning it inside out. "Look for yourself. Do you see how much fat is left on the flesh side?"

"What do you have to say to that, Zhohov?"

"I intended treating the skins later on."

"No, you didn't," Yarak broke in. "You intended to sew these furs up in bags as well, but you didn't manage it. I rode away."

Yarak turned the pelt out on the fur side, blew on it, and said to Los:

"Look, look. The underhair is getting yellow. And when it gets warmed up in the hold it'll all come out."

Zhohov glared at Yarak, and his look was tinged with astonishment. "The sheer audacity of the fellow!" he thought. "Only the other day he wouldn't have dared to talk to me like that!"

"Comrade Los, I answer for the furs to my head office. I know what I'm doing," Zhohov said.

"I don't doubt that you know. But exactly what your idea is in ruining this big lot of furs—that I don't yet know. Why didn't you let Yarak clean the skins when he suggested it to you? Or are you doing all this on purpose?"

"Good heavens, Nikita Sergeyevich!" Zhohov exclaimed in a startled tone. "Maybe I really was guilty of a bit of an oversight. In Krasnoyarsk we always used to ship the furs down to the factory in Moscow this way...."

Los snatched the pelt from Yarak's hand and pushing it under Zhohov's nose he said angrily:

"Look at that, I'm no furrier, yet even I can see what it's all about. Haven't you learnt the simplest things of the fur trade in twenty-five years' experience? I don't believe you. Don't you know that the steamer will make the voyage in forty to fifty days? Do you want to rot all these furs in the stuffy holds of the ship?"

. "Goodness, no, Nikita Sergeyevich! Such an idea never entered my head. Maybe it's an oversight on my part, ignorance of local conditions—"

"You know it all perfectly well. And we know those tricks of yours. They won't work!" Los said, shaking his finger in front of Zhohov's nose.

Yarak gazed triumphantly at Los.

"You've been entrusted with a huge amount of state property and you're trying to destroy it by all kinds of tricks, eh? D'you know what that's called?"

Zhohov was silent.

"I give you ten days to bring these furs into proper shape."

"We'll do it in five," Yarak said.

"And another warning: if you make any attempt to get even with Yarak when I'm gone, I'll remove you from office. Is that clear?"

"Buragov at the head office appointed me to this job. Only the head office can remove me. That's what my instructions say," Zhohov muttered.

"I'll find the courage to remove you without the head office if necessary. And that's that." Los turned on his heel and walked out.

He went to the hospital, still seething inwardly. The doctor met him.

"Well, have you put the house in order there?" the doctor said with a nod in the direction of the trading post. "From what Yarak told me I gather it's no joking matter."

"Thank you, Doctor, for putting Yarak up to the idea of coming to the Revcom. D'you know what might have happened? Out there they would have accused us afterwards, said we're not Communists but a bunch of fatheads. Couldn't cope with one half-literate specialist."

"Is that a gentle hint?" the doctor said in an offended tone.

"No, it's just by the way." Los put his arm around the doctor with a laugh. "Well, tell me, how are things with you?"

"Not too good, Nikita Sergeyevich. They don't want to attend the hospital. How many confinements I missed this winter! Got Mary in now and am overjoyed. But that doesn't count—she's our nurse. She's long overstayed her time, but I'm reluctant to discharge her, for after all, while she's there the hospital is functioning. I must say that we haven't anywhere to make an operation if one were needed."

"We're going to build a cultural service base this year with a hospital for twenty beds and an operating room attached to it."

"That's fine!" the doctor said, ascending the porch of his little hospital.

"Pyotr Petrovich, I'd like to visit Mary."

"Sure, come in. Only put a smock on."

Mary lay in bed writing. Her hair fell in loosened braids over the pillow. Los thought she looked very beautiful.

"Hello, Mary!"

Mary started and cried with delight:

"Los!"

He went up to her, shook hands and sat down on a stool at the bedside.

"What are you writing, Mary?"

"A letter to you," she said, smiling.

"Let's read it."

The letter contained just a few lines:

"Los, you have become quite bad, you are spoilt. You have arrived and do not wish to speak to me. . . ."

Los laughed.

"Well, you are mistaken. Your letter is not right. See, I didn't get it yet and I have come. Well, how are you getting on, Mary?"

"Very good, Los. Now I have a son. Look. Hé will be a strong man, like Yarak."

Los peeped into the little cot and sang out in surprise:

"O-o-h! No! This little fellow will be stronger than Yarak."

Mary sat up and the bedclothes slipped to her waist.

Rultyna came into the ward and squatted down by the door.

"How do you do, Rultyna. I have come to visit your daughter and grandson."

The old woman nodded with a smile. Los went up to her and held out his hand.

Rultyna held it in her own, and looking up at him, she said:

"You have made Mary happy. You are a real man."

"And what is the little fellow's name?" Los asked.

"Andrei," Mary answered.

"Andrei? That's fine! Andrei Yarakovich."

"I wanted them to call him Ben," Rultyna said sadly. "I had a boy Ben. . . . But they named him their own way. Let it be Andrei." Saying which she waved her hand with a good-humoured gesture and went out.

Mary related excitedly how she was working in the hospital, how the doctor was teaching her, how she liked living in the trading-post house and what a good husband Yarak was.

Looking at her, Los thought, "Yes, she's happy. But it might have been otherwise!"

On taking leave he shook her hand firmly. Mary detained his hand in her own and suddenly put her lips to it. . . . Los blushed.

"You mustn't do that, Mary! It is not right!" Los said with a frown.



Mary blushed and looked startled. She did not know that it wasn't right.

Los thought that she was hurt. He bent down, kissed her forehead and went out without a word.

"Well, how's Mary working?" Los asked the doctor when he met him.

"She's a capable girl," Pyotr Petrovich said. "Only she lacks education."

"You know, Doctor, in your place I'd train her as a midwife. That's very important."

"I'll think it over," the doctor replied.

In the fur warehouse ten women were now at work cleaning the fox pelts with coarse-milled rye flour. Rultyna was an expert at removing fat. Each of the women brought up her work for her to inspect, and if she said "Good" the pelt was stacked in another corner. Never in all her life with Charlie had Rultyna worked with such zeal as now. Yarak had said that although all the pelts hung in Zhohov's warehouse their owner was Los.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Alitet lay in his polog on a shabby old reindeer skin. He stared fixedly at the ceiling, his face was clouded and no one dared speak to him. He lay thinking: "What has happened on the coast? Why are men becoming such as they have never been before? I guess it is all because of the teacher. Even Goi-Goi likes to run there. He's a strong man! People always run to the strong man. But he is not strong in goods! Besides the ruble papers he has nothing! What are these strong pieces of paper? The trading yarang, too, is bartering now for these ruble papers."

Alitet took a paper ruble out of his little box and twisted it about in his hands. "Is this bit of paper better

than a polar fox skin?" He threw it contemptuously into the box and stared up again at the ceiling.

He recalled yesterday's conversation with his son. Goi-Goi had rattled off a merry account of the teacher having moved from Vaamcho's into his wooden yarang. The teacher had put five moss burners in it, and Wakat ran herself off her legs tending the flames. At the birth of every moon the teacher gave her strong ruble papers for it, for which they brought her back so much sugar, cartridges, flour and tobacco that you would think she had sent the finest fox pelts. In addition, Wakat was on the Tribal Soviet, and she got ruble papers for that, too. Indeed, she had even forgotten the way to Alitet's yarang.

Narginaut looked pityingly at her husband, got out a good reindeer skin and laid it at his side.

"Charlie," she said, "this skin is softer."

"I have ceased to be a man strong in goods. I shall have to go away into the hills and must get used to a hard bed. Take it away!" Alitet shouted testily. He kicked the skin aside.

Korauge, who sat dozing in a corner, started at Alitet's voice. He reached lazily for his drum and struck it. The drum twanged.

"Stop that!" Alitet cried angrily. "You interfere with my thoughts. The spirits no longer obey you anyhow."

Korauge stared at him blankly with lacklustre eyes and put the drum down.

Silence descended again on the polog. Alitet was thinking hard: "Men have become disobedient. And Tygrena? She always pricked up her ears when news of the Russians was in the air. She ran to where the Russians had put up and it was difficult to keep an eye on her. And now she has not once gone to see the Russian. The teacher called her, but she did not go. The teacher came to the yarang himself, and Tygrena did

not open her ears to his words. Everything is in a jumble, like a team of dogs racing downhill."

Tygrena lived in a separate polog, where she spent all her time sewing torbazes, and rarely went out. She had resigned herself to her lot. Aye was now gone anyway. And she even became angry when Alitet was refused goods in the Russian trading post. Only for two fox skins did Alitet get goods; the rest he brought back. He had not wanted to exchange furs for ruble papers. Alitet fell into a state of melancholy. He ceased travelling. He was probably ashamed to travel on an empty sledge.

And for the first time Tygrena suddenly felt sorry for him.

Alitet came into her polog. Tygrena looked up at him submissively.

"You need not sew torbazes," he said. "It is no use going to the nomads with torbazes alone. I have no cartridges, no tobacco, no matches. Only some Tang food—meat in iron boxes, fruit, butter, onions and pepper." Alitet wrinkled his nose in disgust and added, "Who wants that?"

Tygrena looked at Alitet in silence.

"If Brown doesn't come this summer to Bird's Beak Creek we shall have to go to the hills. Away from the Russians. A lot of them have appeared on the coast this year. I'll have to become a nomad. I shall collect all my reindeer and make them up into one herd. I have very few reindeer, though. Two thousand, I daresay. The nomads will laugh at me. I must buy some more. Buy them for fox skins." He shook his head sadly and added, "But they won't sell them for fox skins. They want goods."

Alitet's face broke out in a sweat from the unwonted mental exertion. He squatted down on the reindeer skin by Tygrena's side.

"Have you heard the news, Charlie?" Tygrena asked, calling him by his new name. "A new Russian has ap-



peared on the Kuvet River. He makes knives and hatchets from hot iron. He makes them for anybody who brings him a lump of iron, but men have no iron. He makes new hatchets out of old ones."

Alitet brightened. "Where does that news come from?" he asked.

"From a passing nomad. Very good hatchets, the kind the reindeer breeders like."

Alitet became lost in thought. Suddenly his face cleared.

"Did you hear that news yourself?"

"Yes, I heard it myself."

Alitet ran to his store and began kicking up the snow. A heap of bar iron thrown away by the American schooner lay here. American smugglers had brought it for trade, but Alitet had not given a single pelt for it and they had abandoned it so as not to ship it back.

Alitet now gazed at the iron with gleaming eyes and whispered to himself. He snatched a bar out of the snow, and instantly felt the iron stick to his hand. He dropped it and sucked his frost-burnt finger, muttering:

"One knife—one reindeer, one hatchet—three reindeer."

In the evening he loaded up one sledge with iron and another sledge with Tang food—butter and fruit—put a sack with polar fox pelts on top, and taking Goi-Goi with him he rode out for the mouth of the Kuvet River.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Soon after Alitet's departure the schoolteacher heard the sound of a motor out at sea. He called Vaamcho and they both raced at top speed down to the beach. Hot on their heels scrambled a troop of little boys. The women ran out too.

The whaleboat was making fast for the shore. .

When its bow grounded on the fringe of ice, the teacher shouted out delightedly:

"Osipov! Hello!"

The people took hold of the whaleboat and dragged it out over the ice in the twinkling of an eye.

"Hello, Dvorkin, still alive?" Osipov said.

"Sure."

"I've brought this whaleboat down for the artel. Left one with Rusakov. I'll train a motorist for you here and go back to him by dog team."

"That's marvellous! How long will you stay here?"

"Probably a couple of weeks."

"Vaamcho, come here," the teacher cried, and introduced him to Osipov: "The chairman of the Tribal Soviet."

Osipov shook hands with him.

"He and I will take motor lessons from you," Dvorkin said. "And now let's go to the school."

"We must take the motor with us," Osipov said with a note of concern.

They lifted the outboard motor from its socket and the teacher swung it on his shoulder. The motor shone with metal parts and different coloured paints. A crowd of people trailed behind the schoolteacher. Old Ilyich meanwhile carefully chipped the ice off the whaleboat's sides with a hatchet.

"Dvorkin, whose whaleboat is that?" Vaamcho asked.

"Ours, Vaamcho, ours. The artel's. And the motor's ours, too."

"O-o-o!" Vaamcho said delightedly. "I guess we must hold a meeting."

"Quite right, Vaamcho! Call all the folks to the schoolhouse."

"The women and children too?"

"Yes, everybody. All who want to come."

Vaamcho ran off. Tygrena stood outside Alitet's yarang watching the crowd.

Vaamcho ran up to her and said:

"Tygrena, Los has sent us an artel whaleboat—with a machine. Los hasn't deceived us. We are going to have a meeting right now. Come along, Tygrena!"

"No, Vaamcho, I shall not go."

"Just as you like, Tygrena," Vaamcho said and made for the next yarang.

Tygrena gazed after him and thought, "He is not timid any more. He is becoming bold. He has made friends with the Russians."

She suddenly felt a desire to go to the school, to which people were running from all the yarangs. She wanted to speak herself to the teacher whom the bearded chief had sent down here. "Aye loved him, the bearded one. But why did he send Aye away from our country to the Russian land? Vaamcho said yesterday that Aye has gone for the new law. But the new law has come here itself. Everywhere on the coast people are talking about the new law. Vaamcho is deceiving me. I guess he has learned deceit from the Russians, like Alitet from the Mericans."

Alek went up to her.

"Let us go to the school, Tygrena," she said. "There will be a lot of news there. It is interesting to listen. He is a good man, that teacher."

Tygrena looked in silence at the woman who had always been pulling Vaamcho back and who now was trying to lead her, Tygrena, on the new trail.

Tygrena frowned. "Go to the school," she said. "Alone."

But when Alek disappeared Tygrena ran in her wake.

The classroom was packed with people. At the presidium table sat old man Ilyich, Vaamcho, the school caretaker Wakat, and the teacher.

Upon entering the school Tygrena felt a stranger there. It seemed to her that everyone was looking at her and laughing at her. She peeped into the room from the school corridor and her eyes alighted on Wakal, who sat next to Vaamcho. That woman and Vaamcho had wanted to compel Alitet to clear away the dead dogs. She had always gone about with lowered head and had spoken to Alitet in a low voice. And now she went about with raised head. What was it? Was it because she often went to this wooden yarang and spoke every time to the Russian teacher?

Tygrena's gaze shifted to old man Ilyich. He sat eyeing the people with an air of importance.

The teacher picked up the motor and put it on the table.

"Comrades!" he said. "There it is, the motor. And your whaleboat is lying on the beach. Now you will never know hunger. We shall have real hunting in the spring. We shall swiftly pursue the walruses on the whaleboat with this motor."

"He speaks truly," old Ilyich said. "I saw how it goes during our voyage here. It goes without sails, by itself. We made the voyage in three days without a single stroke of the oar. The teacher has spoken truly—there will be real hunting in the spring."

Everyone stared with curiosity and admiration at the motor.

"A good spirit dwells in it!" quoth Ilyich. "And its name is Gaz-Oh-Leen. So the instructor said."

*

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Private Kuzakov had been demobilized from the Red Army special duty detachment commanded by Los' friend Tolstukhin. Kuzakov had joined the Party during his service in the Red Army and was now returning to

the Mainland a Communist. He made his way from Kolyma to the Behring Sea where he intended embarking on a steamer, but got stranded on the coast and was forced to winter there.

Kuzakov lived in a hunter's yarang. Having nothing to do he once got busy fixing a broken hatchet. He re-forged it, greatly to the wonder and delight of all the hunters in the settlement. A blacksmith by trade, he threw himself into this pursuit and forged hatchets and knives at his leisure, beguiling the long winter night.

Kuzakov lay in the polog heating a fragment of a broken old knife over the burner when Alitet came in.

"Good day," Alitet said obsequiously.

"Good day, good day," Kuzakov answered and began pounding out the red hot iron on a cobblestone with a little hammer.

Alitet keenly watched the soft, hot iron changing shape under the hammer. Then Kuzakov hung the knife over the burner again.

"You Russian chief?" Alitet asked guardedly.

"Who said I was a chief! I'm a blacksmith."

Alitet picked up a hatchet which Kuzakov had made and toyed with it.

"Very good hatchet. The merchants bring only Meri-can and Russian axes. The nomads like axes this shape."

"If I had the iron, d'you know how many of these I could make!"

"I have iron," Alitet quickly put in. "A lot of iron. It is lying in my sledge." Peering into Kuzakov's face Alitet asked in a wheedling voice, "Do you want to see?"

"Let's have a look."

They went up to the sledge, and an exclamation of delight escaped Kuzakov.

"Gosh! And what iron!" he said with a professional thrill. "If only I had a real anvil and a forge, I'd flood the place with hatchets!"

"What is it—anvil, forge?" Alitet asked eagerly, searching Kuzakov's face.

Kuzakov explained, and it suddenly struck Alitet that he had seen those things in the tundra some years before, abandoned by the Americans at Bald Head Rock.

"I have that!" Alitet exclaimed joyfully. "In two days I shall bring it. I shall ride day and night. I shall make it quickly on a light sledge."

In a few days Alitet came back with a forge, an anvil and charcoal which he had picked out from under the snow.

Alitet rigged up a tent and fixed up a smithy in it. He himself worked untiringly as hammerman, and the sparks flew from under his hammer. Every day Alitet carried out heaps of hatchets and loaded them onto his sledge. In a week he had loaded up his sledge with hatchets. He gave Kuzakov all his supply of Tang food and the sackful of fox skins and rode home in haste to bring back another sledgeload of iron.

Meanwhile Kuzakov had visitors in the person of Vaamcho and the instructor Osipov. The latter's arrival was a great joy to Kuzakov, who had been longing to hear Russian speech. He told Osipov about his life here, and about Alitet and the hatchets he was making for him.

Osipov heard him out in grim silence, then asked:

"You're a Communist, you say?"

"Yes. I'll live here until the summer and then go out to the steamer. Alitet promised to give me a dog team. A smart guy he is! Never saw such a hammerman in all my life!"

"Ugh, you prize sap!" Osipov said with a sigh. "Some Communist you are! D'you know who Alitet is? He's a kulak. A smuggler. He used to boss the whole tundra. That was bad enough, but now he's beginning to put his foot on the necks of Communists, duffers like you!"

Kuzakov was taken aback. "Now, now!" he rejoined. "You keep your shirt on!"

"Listen, you fool!" Osipov exploded. "We're pursuing a policy of restricting and ousting the kulaks from the economic system, and here you are putting Alitet on his feet again. Did that ever enter your fat head? You're knocking the bottom out of all our work! Alitet has bought you off the stump, guts and all. The parasite has twisted you round his little finger without you even noticing it. Why, if Los the Revcom Representative gets to hear of this smithy he'll wring your neck."

"How was I to know all this?" Kuzakov stammered.

"Close up shop here and come with us. We'll find work for you to do at the Revcom. If you're so anxious to work, at least you'll work for us and not the kulaks."

Vaamcho loaded the anvil and forge onto the sledge, and the next morning they all three rode out for Enmakai.

The sun was shining. The dogs ran over the frozen snow crust and left no tracks. The ice packs had come up to the shore again. Boundless ice fields stretched far away to the horizon. Vaamcho ran alongside the sledge, and when he sat down for a rest, Osipov jumped out. Kuzakov ran too.

In the evening they met Alitet's sledge. It was so heavily laden with iron that the dogs could not pull it and Alitet had to help them. The sledges drew abreast of each other and stopped. Alitet looked bewildered, and asked in a low, tremulous voice:

"Where are you going, Kuzakov?"

"To the Revcom," Kuzakov answered.

"Move on, Vaamcho," Osipov said.

Alitet stood for a long time staring at his iron-laden sledge, then suddenly, for no apparent reason, he gave the lead dog a vicious kick.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Floundering in the snow with lowered muzzles, the dogs slowly dragged the sledge. A piercing head wind blowing from the northwest drove the stinging snow into Alitet's face, but he sat motionless in the sledge, holding his cheek out against the wind and did not even shout at the dogs. The blizzard raged all around, the stars had disappeared, and only the tails of the shaft pair of dogs could be seen flickering in the murk. It was deep midnight.

Alitet's cheek served him as a compass. He took his bearings by the direction of the wind. He paid no attention to the blinding snowstorm and thought only of Kuzakov. "Why did they take him away? I suppose this new Russian is also a chief. But what a trashy man Vaamcho has become! It was he who brought him here!"

"*Merkichkin!*" he swore aloud. "Never mind. I shall make hatchets now without Kuzakov. I shall take Omrytagen to help me as hammerman—he is strong. I shall hold and turn over the hot iron myself!"

Buoyed up by the thought of the work ahead, he sprang from the sledge, yelled at the dogs and, fighting the blizzard, gripped the shaft and began to help the dogs.

A film of ice formed on Alitet's cheek. He brushed it off, sat down in the sledge and began rubbing his cheek with snow. The pain brought a wry smile to his lips. "What is the matter?" he asked himself. "I never used to get frostbitten. I have ceased to be a man."

When he had finished rubbing his cheek he jumped up once more, shouted at the dogs, and ran alongside the sledge in the inky darkness.

The settlement in which the smithy stood was asleep. People were not expecting travellers, and no one came

out to meet Alitet. He rode straight to the tent, stopped the dogs and ran in hastily. He struck a thick American match and instantly saw in its light that the anvil and forge were gone. Alitet groaned. He squatted down in the darkness and dropped his head. He sat thus in silence for a long time, till his legs grew numb. The tent moaned and the noise of the flapping canvas sent a chill through the heart.

Alitet lit a match, sliced some shavings off a chunk of wood and built a fire. Placing a few coals in the fire, he started fanning it. Tongues of flame lit up the whole tent, and in the corner he caught sight of the little hammer. He stared at it fixedly.

A dog howled outside and the whole team gave tongue. A man from the neighbouring yarang came into the tent.

"Charlie, what are you sitting here for? Come into my polog. There is tea there, and Goi-Goi is sleeping with me," he said.

Alitet looked up and stared at the man without uttering a word.

"Come, Charlie. It is cold in here."

"Who took all this away?" Alitet asked, pointing to the block on which the anvil had stood.

"The Russians. At first they had words, then Vaamcho began to load it all on the sledge. You can't make them out, these Russians! The new man was angry. Vaamcho brought him. He has also become a chief. He told me so himself."

"I'll go after them and carry Vaamcho off—lasso him like a wild reindeer and bring him here, to this tent. I'll take his trousers off and sit him down on the cold iron, then you'll see what kind of a chief he is. . . . Where has he taken Kuzakov?"

"To Los."

"What did they talk about?"



"Can one understand the birds when they talk among themselves?"

"And what did Vaamcho say, that crazy, wretched man?"

"He said that one man from our settlement must go to a big celebration to Los. Omrytagen volunteered to go."

"Omrytagen? I wanted to make hatchets with him."

"They left him a string of buttons. He takes one button off every morning. When the string is empty he is to go to the Feast of the Big Speaking."

"Tell me no more!" Alitet cried irritably. "Do not speak of it. Better let us go and have tea."

Goi-Goi sat on a reindeer skin writing on a sheet of paper with the stub of a pencil. Alitet tore both the paper and the pencil out of his hands. He ripped the paper into tiny bits and frenziedly chewed the pencil into a pulp. The boy looked up guiltily at his father.

"Father, you yourself told me to study," he said softly.

"You don't have to. Go harness your team. I will soon set out on it. When my dogs have rested you will return home on them."

"Charlie, but maybe alone he will not find the road," the master of the yarang said.

"He will," Alitet muttered. "Quick, give me some tea."

CHAPTER TWENTY

When he finished drinking tea Alitet stepped into the smithy again. All that remained of it was the forgotten hammer. He stood looking at the hammer a long time, then picked it up and tapped a block of wood with it.

Then he took the tent down, laid it in the sledge and sped off toward Enmakai.

Alitet returned home on the night of the third day. He woke up Tygrena and bade her light the burner.

Tygrena covered Aivam with a reindeer calfskin and lit the moss wick which was steeped in seal fat. A little tongue of flame lit up the polog. She made another little tongue with a burning splinter, then quickly joined them in a broad ribbon of flame.

Narginaut came into the polog.

Alitet glowered at her and said:

"What have you come for? You are a silly woman! Better see to the dogs. Unharness them and feed them. But not right away. Give them time to cool down. They have been running fast and have got heated. Go!"

Narginaut withdrew in silence.

Tygrena took a reindeer skin off the ceiling rafter, opened it out and placed it beside Alitet. He rolled over onto the skin and stretched his limbs.

"How many Russians are there in the settlement?" he asked, staring at the ceiling.

"One. Only the teacher," Tygrena answered.

"And where are the others?"

"Two left this morning."

"Did Vaamcho go with them?"

"No. He is here."

Alitet spun round. "Here?" he asked in a whisper.

The fur curtain lifted and the yellow face of the shaman Korauge was thrust into the polog.

"You have come, Charlie?" he said in his quavery voice.

"Go to sleep! There is no help from you just the same. Go away!"

Disconcerted, Korauge raised a trembling hand to his sparse beard.

"You are becoming disrespectful, Charlie," he said, staring at his son.

"I am tired. I am very tired." Alitet waved his hand. "Go to sleep."

With a hiss Korauge stole out of the polog.

"Charlie," Tygrena said, "tell him he should never come to my polog. It will be bad, Charlie, if he starts coming to me."

Alitet said nothing—which meant that he agreed with Tygrena.

She hung the kettle over the burner and started to break up some frozen reindeer meat.

"Many thoughts have collected in my head," Alitet said. "All kinds of thoughts. . . . Take the meat away. I don't want to eat. . . ."

Tygrena grew alert. She was seized with sudden alarm.

Alitet drew closer to her, his eyes glittering, and he hissed:

"I will go to him and kill him."

"You want to kill Vaamcho?"

"Very much. He is in my way, that crazy man."

"What do you want to kill him with? A knife or a gun?"

"I will strangle him with my hands."

Tygrena got out the brick tea in silence and began chipping off pieces with a knife and putting them into the kettle.

"Charlie," she said with perfect composure, "if you strangle Vaamcho, the teacher will kill you. He is great friends with him. The teacher is a strong man. . . . And who will then collect your reindeer in the numerous herds of the neighbouring tribe?"

Alitet filled his pipe and lit up.

"You think I should not kill Vaamcho?" he said, inhaling smoke.

"You should not. The Russians will start hunting you, even if you should run away into the hills in the night. Very many of them have appeared on the coast. Vaamcho is a great friend of theirs. He has become a different man himself. He is no longer timid."

"Where does he get the power from?" Alitet asked.

"I do not know. From the Russians, I suppose. They have brought him a whaleboat for hunting the walrus. They have taught him how to tease the iron motor. Every day outside the school Vaamcho jerks the motor by a strap. The motor lets out smoke, it gets angry and begins to snort and make a noise. And in the middle of it there's fire. The motor will drive the whaleboat to the hunt. The motor drove the whaleboat down here all the way from the Cape of Chukotsk Nose."

Alitet was all ears.

"Where is that motor?" he asked.

"They keep it locked up in the school. The whaleboat is on the beach, opposite Vaamcho's yarang."

Tygrena poured him out a cup of tea.

"Drink," she said.

Alitet pushed the cup away. Afire with excitement, hate burning in his eyes, Alitet crawled out of the polog.

"Tygrena," came his voice from the little passage.

"Give me light. It is dark here."

Tygrena held up a burning splinter. "Charlie," she asked in alarm, "where are you going?"

Alitet took a long-handled American axe.

"You want to kill Vaamcho with an axe?" Tygrena asked.

Alitet vanished in the darkness without a word.

Tygrena swiftly dressed, ran to Vaamcho's yarang and stopped, but the only sound coming from inside was the breathing of people asleep.

Tygrena thought to herself, "He is not here. I suppose he has gone to the whaleboat."

She dived into Vaamcho's polog, groped in the dark until she found him, then shook him and said softly:

"Vaamcho, Alitet has gone to the whaleboat with an axe."

Alek woke up and lit the burner. Vaamcho was already sitting up in his bed and putting on his torbazes. He was in such a hurry that he could not get his foot into the torbaz at once.

"Go and tell the teacher," Tygrena said.

Stars glimmered here and there through the night clouds. The schoolhouse loomed in the darkness like a big granite boulder.

Vaamcho ran past the school, making straight for the beach. Alitet sat astride the keel of the whaleboat with an axe in his hands.

Upon catching sight of Vaamcho he started, and the axe slid with a clatter along the bottom of the whaleboat. Vaamcho seized the axe by its long handle.

"Why have you come here with an axe, man of the night?" he demanded in a loud voice.

Alitet continued to sit on the whaleboat in silence.

Vaamcho, without waiting for his reply, threw away the axe and gave Alitet a push. Alitet fell but got up immediately. They stood facing each other with the whaleboat between them.

"How many women have been left without husbands, whom you have drowned?" Vaamcho said. "Now you want to leave them to die of hunger without a whaleboat!"

"Do not raise the spirits of the dead," Alitet said, and after a pause, added, "It is a strong whaleboat. I came to smash it up, but I couldn't. I couldn't find the heart to do it. The axe would not obey me. I guess it is a better whaleboat than my sunken one. . . . I feel dizzy. Give me back the axe and I will go home."

Back in his polog, Alitet sat drinking tea, a prey to many baffling thoughts.

"I paid the Merican a lot for my whaleboat. Where will Vaamcho get the means to pay for the whaleboat?" he asked Tygreña.

"They say everybody will pay. The whole artel."

"Don't talk nonsense," Alitet said with a sneer. "Where will the husbandless women find the pay? Do you not know that there is nothing in their yarangs but rotten reindeer skins? The Tangs are not very keen on them, they like fox skins. The Russians haven't found it out yet. Go to the teacher and tell him about it. Only from me can they get good payment."

"I will not go to him. My tongue will not obey me to speak to the Russian," Tygreña answered.

"Neither will mine," Alitet concurred with satisfaction.

"There is a rumour that the people will pay five winters for the whaleboat, a little at a time—with walrus skins, tusks and ruble papers."

"These Russians do not understand a thing about fox skins. I would give many fox skins for such a good whaleboat! Brown would never trade it for walrus skins alone. He understands."

Reminded of Brown, Tygreña said:

"I guess he is a swindler, that Brown. He has bad eyes. I guess he will not bring you any goods. When the Mericans drank the firewater I watched them all the time. You sec, they will deceive you. They won't bring you anything."

"Shut up!" Alitet shouted. "Your tongue has grown too long. Only give a woman the chance—she will talk no end of nonsense."

Tygreña turned to the burner and began tending the flame.

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Alitet stretched on the skins, heaved a painful sigh and said:

"We must go away to the hills. . . . One's eyes here will get tired of seeing the Russians. . . . And that artel. . . . I have a lot of hatchets, but without licker they will go cheap. I shall make licker myself."

Tygrena stared at Alitet in astonishment. She thought he was beginning to lose his senses.

"Why are you staring at me like an owl at a hare?" Alitet growled.

"You can make licker?" Tygrena asked.

"I can. You must mix flour with water, cover it with warm skins, then put it on the burner, and the firewater will drip through the barrel of a Winchester. But there isn't any flour. The Russian merchant does not give me more than one pood at a time. He is stupid. He doesn't seem to want my fox pelts. He wanted to give me ruble papers for them."

Morning came, and Alitet was still thinking and thinking. He shouted to Narginaut:

"Go to the neighbours and trade one white fox skin for one pood of flour. Their eyes will pop out for joy and they will trade all their stocks of flour. The Russian gives four poods for one fox skin, but I ask for only one."

Narginaut went on her errand. Alitet gorged himself with seal meat and lay down to sleep. His sleep was troubled and short. Narginaut came back.

"Charlie, there isn't any flour. I traded one little sack with Tumatuge's wife, but the teacher told her not to take your fox skin. So she took the flour back. The teacher said, 'Go to the trading yarang yourselves, you have dogs.' She did what he told her, Charlie."

"*Merkichkin!*" Alitet swore. His brow puckered and he began thinking. "In that case spread the rumour that Charlie is giving away one dog for one little sack of flour," he said at length. "For twelve little sacks I shall

give a whole dog team. All the same I have too many of them. They only eat up the food."

Narginaut went out, and the rumour which she spread found its way into every yarang.

Vaamcho ran at once to the teacher. Dvorkin listened to the news, then said:

"I guess you need a good team, Vaamcho."

"Yes, yes, I do," Vaamcho said eagerly. "Oi, how I need a good dog team! You can travel so fast on it. But I have only four little sacks of flour, and I need twelve."

"All right, Vaamcho, I shall give you eight sacks of my own. You'll return it to me later."

"Yes, yes. I'll return it. I have fox skins and ruble papers. I shall go quickly to Rusakov."

"All right, Vaamcho. Buy the dogs from him. It's cheap, isn't it?"

Vaamcho winked knowingly. "It's next to nothing," he said softly. "I guess he must be losing his senses. Rusakov gives four little sacks for one skin. And a dog is worth five fox skins. All his dogs are good ones."

"Go on, Vaamcho! Buy them!" the teacher said firmly.

When he reached his yarang Vaamcho leaned against the jamb of the outside door and took to studying the sky as though that were the only thing that interested him.

Near his own yarang, looking at the sea, stood Alitet.

Vaamcho could not hold himself back. "Charlie!" he shouted all of a sudden. "You wish to exchange a team for flour?"

"Yes."

"True, I have dogs of my own, but if you wish I will give you twelve little sacks. But for good dogs."

Alitet's face twitched. "You crazy man!" he cried. "Did you ever see me have a bad dog? You will take the team on which Goi-Goi returns."

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"For that team I guess I will exchange. I shall go to meet Goi-Goi."

"First bring the flour."

Vaamcho quickly loaded twelve sacks of flour on the sledge, harnessed his dogs to it, dumped the flour outside Alitet's yarang on the way, and sped off to meet Goi-Goi.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Everything that was happening on the coast people called the new life. And all this tried Alitet's patience. At home he forbade anyone to speak of the new life. The trade to which he had devoted himself utterly had come to an end. Alitet was lost. He did not know what to do. Only the Russians had goods. Not a single Merican trader was left. His whaleboat was sunk. The schooner hadn't come. Where was he to get goods from? These thoughts drove Alitet mad.

He puttered miserably about his sledge, loading it with hatchets and home-brewed firewater poured out into walrus bladders. True, these were good wares, but there were neither rifles, cartridges, tobacco, beads nor chewing gum in the sledge. There were no needles, thimbles, combs or bells. . . .

Alitet tied down the sledge, stood over it deep in thought, then went into the polog.

"Tygrena," he said. "I guess I should put on a cloth shirt. I will look more like a Merican that way. I have little goods in the sledge. Very little. Only hatchets,"

Alitet took out the shirt and reluctantly put it on.

The Taki Black Beetle paper issued by Mr. Brown rustled in the pocket of the shirt.

Alitet pulled out the paper, carefully unfolded it and stared dully at it.

"Therel" he said to Tygrena, waving it in the air. "There are a lot of goods in it. Brown will bring them in the summer. He knows where to bring them—I told him the place. No one will see."

Tygrena said nothing.

Thrusting the paper back into his pocket, Alitet dressed for the journey and rode out to the hills, to his friend Echavto, the reindeer herder.

Old Echavto roamed the same places he had the previous two years. But life in his encampments had also



been very near to being disturbed. Rumours about a new life penetrated to the hills as well. In the wake of these rumours came a Russian who had talks with the herdsmen. Echavto would not enter into idle talk with him. The Russian was not a trading man. Echavto had nothing to talk to him about. Let him talk to the herdsmen. But when Echavto learned that three herdsmen, now called the Tribal Soviet, had been appointed the masters of his encampment, he laughed.

When the Russian had gone he called these three herdsmen to him and said:

"Harness me swift-footed white reindeer. I will go out to the herd."

The men led up the reindeer team. Echavto sat down in the sledge, took the reins and said:

"Now, you Tribal Soviet, run after me to the herd."

He whipped the reindeer with the reins and they dashed off over the frozen snow crust, lumps shooting out from under their hoofs. The three herdsman ran behind the sledge as fast as their legs could carry them.

When they came running up to where the herd was, Echavto in a light marbled parka drawn about the middle by a leather strap was sauntering amid the grazing reindeer. They were scattered all over the foot of a hill as far as the eye could see, so many reindeer were there.

"Come here!" Echavto cried in a shrill voice.

The herdsman came up, panting with fatigue, and sat down in the snow at his feet.

"How many of your own reindeer have you?" Echavto asked the oldest herdsman.

"Twenty," the latter answered.

"And you?" he asked the second man.

"Only eight. Very few yet."

"And how many have you?"

"Eleven," the third man answered.

"Aha-a!" drawled Echavto. "You have quite a lot of reindeer now. When you came to me the first time you had nothing. . . . Take your reindeer from the herd and leave my encampment. Live separately. I do not need your Tribal Soviet."

The herdsman glanced at one another.

"Echavto," one of the herdsman said timidly—the one who possessed eight reindeer—"how are we going to live? We have no yarangs, no sledges and no sledge reindeer. How can we pasture our reindeer? We shall have to go to the mouse eaters on the coast."

"We shall perish, Echavto," said another.

"I have plenty of herdsman left," Echavto said, straightening his trousers. "Pick out your reindeer, quick!"

The herdsman stood silent with lowered heads.

"Come on, quick!" he shouted.

When Alitet arrived at the encampment Echavto was lying in his plog taking a swig out of a bottle.

"Charlie has come?" Echavto asked in a singsong voice.

Alitet looked at the old man in surprise. Where had he got firewater from? He took off his parka, smoothed down his cloth shirt, and asked in astonishment:

"You know that I am Charlie?"

"The tundra is full of rumours," Echavto said in a thin voice.

The women eyed Charlie-Alitet in silence.

"I have brought a lot of goods," Alitet said. Turning to one of Echavto's wives, he added, "Keipa, bring me one of the hatchets from my sledge."

Keipa disappeared in an instant and reappeared with a hatchet which Alitet had purposely laid on top of the sledge.

Echavto turned the hatchet before his nose as though he were smelling it, then said cheerfully:

"A good hatchet!"

"I have brought a lot of them," Alitet said in a tone of pride.

"What other goods have you brought?"

Alitet lit his pipe, swallowed some smoke, then cleared his throat and said:

"I have brought strong firewater. Keipa, fetch a little walrus bladder from my sledge. It is lying on top."

Echavto leaned toward Alitet and fingered his cloth shirt.

"You have become a Tang," he said.

"Yes! A Merican!" Alitet threw out importantly.

"They say there are no Mericans on the coast. Such a rumour has come to the tundra. Many Russians have arrived. One visited me too. His talk was empty. He carries only words. He made a Tribal Soviet here. Three

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herdsmen. I chased them out. Now not a single master will take them."

Alitet pricked up his ears. "Where did they go, those herdsmen?"

"They went off to the sea. Went off on foot."

Keipa came back with the bladder and stood listening to the conversation between the two men.

Alitet took the bladder from her and held it up to Echavto.

"Here it is, firewater. Very good stuff. It never freezes."

"Hee-hee-hee, I don't seem to have ever seen firewater carried about in such vessels," Echavto said ironically.

"This is specially for nomad life, it doesn't break."

"I have firewater myself now. A lot of firewater."

"Where did you get it?" Alitet asked.

"Hee-hee," the old man began. "A new Merican has appeared at Hot Springs. 'Nick' his name is."

"Is he a trading man?" Alitet broke in.

"No. He is searching for something in the streams and among the rocks. He has no goods. Only firewater. He used to come only in the summer, now he has stayed for the winter. His boat got spoilt. I put up a yarang for him at Hot Springs and send him meat. I give him reindeer to ride about on. He likes to look at our country. Draws the little rivers and hills on a piece of paper. He gives me firewater."

Thunderstruck by this news, Alitet hung on Echavto's lips. When he came to himself he poured out a cup of the home-brew and said:

"You try mine, friend."

Echavto did not refuse the invitation. He drew up to the cup and drained it. Then, licking his wet lips, he uttered:

"Good firewater.... What other goods have you brought?"

Alitet hesitated. He was ashamed to confess that he had no other goods.

Drinking down his cup, he said in a tone of regret:

"All the Mericans have gone away to fetch goods. They will bring them in the summer."

"Oh, I see," and Echavto stared at Alitet openmouthed, feigning the simpleton.

Alitet turned away in confusion and poured out some more of the home-brew. They drank again.

"Echavto," Alitet said, "it is time for me to collect my reindeer. I think of leading a nomad's life."

"Well, well, go ahead."

"I think I'll go after your three herdsmen and take them to tend my separate herd. Eh?"

"They will be glad to live in your herd. It is better to be with you than to eat up their last few reindeer. Take them, take them. I don't think they will want to go back to the Tribal Soviet now."

"I'll smash their heads against the rocks if they ever think of going back to the Tribal Soviet," Alitet said, refilling the cups.

Echavto interrupted him. "Stop, stop! Let us not drink much. You have no goods anyway. Now I drink little. I have a whole iron cask of firewater—over here." Echavto crawled to the corner where he pulled aside some reindeer skins to reveal a thirty-litre drum. "More than half is still left. This much." Pulling his lips back over his gums, Echavto traced a mark on the drum with his tough fingernail.

Alitet gulped in envy. He sat looking at his friend in silence; he did not know what to say.

"You have no goods. Firewater alone is not enough to gladden the heart."

"I have hatchets," Alitet said in a flat voice. "Many hatchets. A sledge full of them."

"Hee-hee-hee.... Ten hatchets are enough for me,"

Echavto said. "One for each herd." Then, glancing at the hatchet, he added, "They are good hatchets. I can take ten more. I have some fox skins. I will give you all the skins for the hatchets."

"I do not need fox skins. I need live reindeer."

"Hee-hee-hee. You do not like foxes any more? And I have many of them. I collected them for you."

"I want to become a nomad, Echavto. I am tired of living on the coast, and my herd is small as yet."

"Hee-hee-hee. . . . Want to live the life of a nomad? All right. After all, you are a friend of mine. For twenty hatchets I will give you ten times twenty reindeer."

They came to an arrangement about picking out Alitet's reindeer from Echavto's herds, and Alitet raced off to overtake the three herdsman for his new herd.

Barely had he disappeared over the hill, when eight sledges loaded with various goods rode into the encampment. It was the manager of the trading post, Rusakov, come to do a hawking trade.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Amguema rumbled under its thick covering of ice. It carried its waters over a stony bed from the Anadyr Ridge to the Arctic Ocean. Winding tortuously through rolling valleys and narrow gorges hemmed in between high mountains, the Amguema stretched for hundreds of miles. Its banks were broken by countless tributaries and streams. The vast watershed with its abundant and juicy Iceland mosses was the favourite pasturage of the big reindeer breeders. Tens of thousands of reindeer grazed here in a semiwild state.

The patches of creeping willow, dwarf birch and alder—the woody plant life of the North—lay hidden under snow until summer. Only on the hillsides, from which

the tempestuous winds swept away the layer of snow, were the rabbit-gnawed trunks of solitary trees visible.

The low white sky merged with the deep snow, and in that expanse every living thing was lost. These places seemed deserted and lifeless, except for the occasional snow-white ptarmigan that took wing and instantly disappeared from view.

The wind swept the snow noiselessly over the frozen surface of the river, and the clean, translucent ice sparkled like the Milky Way.

Alitet rode swiftly downstream, slightly braking his sledge with the iron point of the gee pole. He left behind him on the ice a long line, showing that a man had passed this way.

The silent, jagged black cliffs stood out sharply against the snow-white tundra.

All of a sudden Alitet braked the sledge sharply, leaving a deep mark in the ice. Digging their claws into the ice, the dogs slid to a stop.

Alitet picked up his Winchester and scanned the rocks. High up a mountain sheep was scampering along the ledges of a perpendicular rock. It made such amazing leaps that Alitet gazed in admiration without raising his rifle. Then he fired. For a split second the sheep appeared trans-fixed to the spot; it seemed to hang in the air, but the next instant it hurtled down, bouncing off the ledges of the cliff. It still seemed to be leaping, after death. Suddenly its sturdy ring-like horns caught on a sharp jutting rock and it hung there, swaying gently.

Alitet loaded eight cartridges into the lower barrel of the Winchester and began shooting at the horns. He fired all the bullets but the carcass continued to hang there.

"Let the wind tear it loose," Alitet muttered as he went back to the sledge. He sat down, casting sidelong glances at the sheep.

"The Mericans like that meat," he thought. "They like it more than reindeer meat." He picked up another box of cartridges and toyed with it, lost in thought. It was a pity to waste the bullets, but he loaded the Winchester, took aim again and fired a dumdum bullet. The sheep dropped to Alitet's feet, followed by a small avalanche of rocks. He jumped aside. When the rumble had died down he went up to the sheep. After inspecting the smashed horn he gripped the whole one and dragged his game to the sledge.

"I will give it to the Merican Nick and I will buy all his firewater," flashed through Alitet's mind. "Let not a single drop remain for Echavto."

The thought of Nick the Merican preyed constantly on his mind. Alitet was so eager to meet him that he even forgot about the herdsmen he had wished to overtake. A ray of hope was born in his heart that he would perhaps be able to mend his broken fortunes. He yelled at the dogs and they dashed down the river over the smooth ice at breakneck speed. At the bends in the river the sledge was thrown against the banks, and to prevent it from being smashed on the sharp jutting rocks Alitet kicked off from the banks at the risk of breaking a leg.

Soon, amid the silence of the tundra, he heard the roar of a waterfall. The dogs pricked up their ears. Alitet did not like this spot; he stood in superstitious awe of this waterfall which did not freeze even in the severest frosts. He swung the dogs off onto a slope, from the height of which he saw the cataract rushing out from under its ice covering and go crashing down in a swirling billow. The river here was alive and turbulent. It was hemmed in by two rocks, but it escaped from its icy prison and flowed out in a broad stream over the valley. The thin layer of water that spread over the icebound surface froze into a pale green crust of ice.

Mounds of ice piled up here during the long winter and it seemed as though no sun could ever melt them. The

destructive power of the spring floods, however, lifted all this mass of ice, crushed it and swept it out to sea.

People shunned this spot as the haunt of evil spirits. Alitet skirted it, urging on his dogs in a subdued voice. He turned off to Hot Springs, which, like the waterfall, were also haunted by evil spirits.

Alitet would never have come to this place but for his strong desire to meet the Merican Nick, who lived at these springs.

He drove the dogs hard all night, so eager was he to meet the Merican.

Towards morning Alitet saw in the distance clouds of vapour rising from the ground. With a loud yell at the dogs and a rattle of gee-pole rings he drove the team on at full speed.

Soon he saw a solitary yarang darkly silhouetted against the snowy whiteness, like a boulder. Here in this white wilderness lived Mr. Nick, all alone save for his sole companion, Tommy, a brown poodle.

The yarang stood at the foot of a hill, in the midst of the hot springs, of which there were about thirty. They gushed out from the earth and flowed into the river.

A snow grotto over ten metres high formed near the biggest spring. The blizzard drove snowdrifts into it which hardened from the action of the vapours. Big drops of water dripped from the ceiling of this huge cave. The stony floor, covered with green mould, was washed by rivulets of hot water.

A cavity lined with cobblestones was built into the floor of the cave, which served Mr. Nick as a bath. He ran cold water up here through a fire hose. The temperature of the springs was as much as ninety-four degrees centigrade, and the canny American had harnessed all this thermal energy to his service. He boiled coffee and reindeer meat in the spring. Wrapping up rice in gauze he dipped it into the spring and brought it out again after a short while as

cooked porridge, which required but salt and butter to make it a ready dish. The yarang built by Echavto's herdsmen had a fur polog lined by a double coil of hose through which hot water circulated all the time.

When Alitet's team dashed up, the brown poodle, frightened almost out of its wits, fled yelping into the cave where Mr. Nick, a bath towel tied round his head, sat sunk in his bath up to the shoulders. The terror-crazed poodle jumped straight onto its master's head.

"Hel-lo-o-o! Who the devil has scared my pal Tommy?!" Mr. Nick shouted.

At the sound of the human voice Alitet grew alert. Winchester in hand, he stepped warily towards the cave.

"Hey, you! Drop that Winchester! Put it next to mine."

Alitet silently and submissively lowered his rifle onto the rocks. Nick continued to sit in the bath holding the poodle on the surface of the water.

He sat there until the time set aside for the bath expired.

Alitet gaped at this amazing Merican

Nick climbed out of the water and, carrying the poodle, walked over the mould-covered stones to the edge of the cave. He dropped the poodle, quickly drew on a Turkish-towelled bathrobe, then a cloak of reindeer calfskin and, running past Alitet, shouted:

"Run after me!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Mr. Nick's polog contained a camp cot, a three-legged folding table and a camp stool. A carbide lamp hanging from the fur wall gave a fairly bright light. The end of a small green iron-bound chest projected from under the bed. The whole floor was carpeted with reindeer skins. Both the yarang and the polog were an exact copy of a Chukchi dwelling.



Upon coming into his "house" Mr. Nick threw off his clothes, and pointing to a place by the entrance, he said to Alitet:

"Sit down therel"

Nick gave his muscular body, reddened by the bath, a brisk rubdown. He was a dark man of about thirty-five, with quick, shrewd brown eyes and a clean-shaven face. He had lived all the conscious years of his life in Alaska, searching for gold. He looked an unsociable, dour and even ill-natured man. He had become so thoroughly inured to all sorts of incredible conditions that he could not imagine any other kind of life. This rough and lonely life had set its unmistakable mark upon him. His element was the desolate wastes of the North, his aim in life, gold.

Here, in the basin of the Amguema River, he had already spent four summers looking for gold deposits. Every autumn he went back to Alaska and returned in early spring in his motorboat.

When the workings in Alaska "dried up," the big mineowners began to show an interest in the Chukotsk Peninsula, which, according to some scientists, was not separated from Alaska by the strait in remote geological ages.

On the supposition that the auriferous veins of Alaska had their continuation in Chukotsk, the gold miners spared no effort to prospect and establish their claims to the gold deposits of Chukotsk.

An experienced and enterprising prospector, Nick had been nosing about the Chukotsk territory for several years on behalf of a gold-mining company.

One day, on coming back to his shanty, he had found his household in a state of disorder. More than half of the gasoline cans were empty. The grizzly bear, seeking food or perhaps provoked by a spirit of mischief, had made holes in the gasoline cans and even smashed a cartridge case with a stone. The shining objects had evidently

caught his fancy, for cartridges were scattered all over the floor, as though he had been playing with them. Nick had spent a long time collecting them, during which process he called Bruin many ugly names. It was the grizzly bear that had compelled him to winter that year in the basin of the Amguema.

The long winter, which buried the rock bed under deep snow and froze the streams and the river, consigned him to a period of idleness. He was not fond of trapping or hunting, and though red polar foxes scampered about in the vicinity of his dwelling he never once shot at them. He considered the pursuit beneath the dignity of a real gold prospector.

Occasionally, when Echavto sent him a reindeer team, he would go for a spin in good weather over the river valleys and the hills, studying the relief, scanning the terrain with an experienced eye, defining its possibilities by the character of the geological structure.

Alitet took off his parka, rolled it up and squatted down on it. It was warm in the polog.

"Oho! You have an American shirt!" Mr. Nick exclaimed in surprise.

"I like Mericans very much," Alitet said in a flattering voice. "My friends were always only Mericans. I do not like the Russians. They are spoiling our people, like a bad driver spoils his dogs."

"That doesn't interest me!" Nick cried. "Stop talking nonsense! I don't like dog talk. Instead tell me who you are and what brought you here."

He quickly put on a pair of blue overalls, lit his pipe and sat down on the stool, crossing one leg over the other.

"I am Charlie," Alitet said quietly. "My name is Charlie."

"Oho! Charlie!" Nick said with a laugh.

"For a long time I used to trade in furs. Now the Russians do not let me trade. I know the whole tundra from

Cape Pehek to Chukotsk Nose. They are doing bad things for the nomad folk."

"They're doing the right thing. Fur trading's a useless occupation. You ought to look for gold."

Mr. Nick opened his chest and took out a handful of gold dust. He poured it slowly from hand to hand.

"This is the stuff to look for!" he said. "It's a noble pursuit. Not like dealing in trashy pelts. D'you get me?"

Alitet eyed the gold dust indifferently. He did not know what to say to this odd Merican.

"You say you know the whole tundra. Did you ever come across such things in the beds of streams?" Nick asked, throwing a gold pebble into Alitet's hands.

"I did," Alitet answered, examining the nugget. "But I didn't collect these stones. I don't need them."

"Where did you see them?" Nick cut in hastily.

"In the tributaries of the Kuvet."

Mr. Nick quickly unrolled a map, laid it on the table and beckoned Alitet, saying:

"Where is the Kuvet River?"

Alitet stood bent over the map, scrutinizing it, then said:

"The Kuvet is not here. What is this?"

"That's the Amguema with all its tributaries."

Alitet shook his head and said:

"The Amguema is wrong. The tributaries are wrong too."

"Wrong? Correct them. Here's a pencil."

"I can't do it on here. Come out into the snow."

They went outside, and Alitet began tracing the whole basin of the Amguema on the snow with the point of his gee pole.

"And this is where the Kuvet is," Alitet said, stepping over his drawing on tiptoe so as not to obliterate it and tracing a long winding line.

"Good for you!" Mr. Nick cried in amazement. "You've got brains in that head of yours!"

He began there and then copying out on paper everything that Alitet had traced in the snow. They went back into the yarang, and Mr. Nick produced a bottle of whisky.

"You're a smart guy. I want to treat you. Sit down on the stool." The host himself sat down on the bed.

They spoke about the red iron that lay in the beds of the rivers and streams and about whether Alitet would agree to row Mr. Nick out to the American island, seeing that he had no gasoline for his motor.

Before they had time to put down a mug of firewater each the yelping of dogs came to their ears. They ran out to find Alitet's dogs mauling the brown poodle, which was emitting fearful yelps. Mr. Nick dashed into the circle of Alitet's dogs to rescue Tommy. Alitet began beating them with the gee pole.

Tommy, bleeding profusely, whined and gazed piteously at his master. Mr. Nick hugged the dog and cried out furiously:

"Goddam! If Tommy dies tonight I'll shoot your rotten dogs. Every last one of them!"

Alitet fixed a puzzled stare on Mr. Nick. The Merican was shouting nonsense. Or didn't he know that the dogs were not to blame if they had come upon this helpless little dog that lived to no apparent purpose? Alitet looked at the brown poodle in disgust.

Then he went into the yarang for his parka. Dressing on the way, he walked over to his sledge without saying a word.

"Wait, wait! Where are you going?" Nick cried. "Maybe Tommy won't die. We haven't drunk the firewater yet or finished our talk. Or don't you like firewater?"

Alitet halted in indecision.

Nick, holding the poodle in one hand, caught Alitet by the belt with the other and pulled him inside.

Alitet had taken an instant dislike to Nick. Was the work this Merican was doing befitting a grown man? He played like a boy with pebbles of red iron from the beds of streams. The only attraction for Alitet was the firewater.

Inside the polog Mr. Nick painted Tommy's wounds with iodine, bandaged them with gauze and set him on his own pillow. Alitet watched the Merican with displeasure, without saying a word. Nothing here was to his liking. Only after he had downed a second mug of firewater did he speak.

"The trading man, Charlie, who lived at Loren was a great friend of mine," he said. "I have now taken his name. Brown too is my friend. We did good trade with him."

"They're crooks, those traders!" Nick cried. "Gold's the thing you've got to look for—you'll be a rich man. You show me where to find the red iron, and you'll see how rich you'll become. You'll go with me to America, and when you'll walk down the street of a big town everyone will say, 'Look at him! He's a very rich man! He found a nugget the size of a horse's head.' "

Alitet did not understand a thing Mr. Nick was talking about. He said:

"Pour me out some more firewater."

He tossed off the cup, swallowed some reindeer fat that tasted like butter, then drew the Taki Black Beetle I.O.U. out of his pocket and said:

"Look, Brown gave me this paper. There are a lot of goods in it. He'll soon bring them to Bird's Beak Gorge for me."

Mr. Nick read the document, and Alitet, who was watching his face, saw the same expression he had seen

on the face of Charlie Red Nose when the latter was reading the same paper.

Mr. Nick suddenly burst out laughing.

"He's a louse, that Brown of yours!" Nick said. "He's a crook and a cheat. You should rip that paper into pieces and throw them in the devil's own jaws. D'you know what's written here? He's a son-of-a-bitch, that Brown is. He tricked you!" Mr. Nick roared.

Alitet sat with bated breath, trying hard to follow the drift of Nick's sudden outburst. "Why, is it a bad paper?" he hazarded at length.

"It isn't a paper, it's tripe Brown is making fun of you. He laughs at you. He'll never even dream of bringing you goods." And Nick explained in detail what Brown had written.

Alitet sat looking up glumly from under lowered brows. He listened in silence.

"Tell me what else Brown says in this paper."

Nick read the paper out to Alitet:

"'Good-bye, you squint-eyed devil! You've been a pain in the neck for me these five days, blast you and whoever it was put you up to this kind of trading. Don't worry—the rest of the furs will just put me right. So will the bearskins, damn you! They'll find a buyer in America. Good-bye again, this time for good.' That's what he's written you, that trading friend of yours, the lowdown crook."

Alitet had sobered down quite a while ago. He looked dazed and his head reeled, but it was with rage and not the alcohol.

"I knew that fellow Brown in Alaska," Nick went on. "The biggest crook alive. Yes, yes, I'm telling you the truth. Chuck this fur trading. Gold's the thing to look for! It's an honest and noble calling. In the summer

you'll take me down to the American island. And now let's go to sleep. We'll talk business tomorrow." Saying which Nick tore the paper into shreds.

Alitet, with a painful sigh, spread the sleeping skins on the floor. Nick got into bed, and soon his mighty snores resounded in the polog.

Alitet was unable to fall asleep. He lay thinking of how he had traded with Brown, and remembered his recent talk with Tygrena about the Mericans. "I guess she was right about their being cheats. And Charlie Red Nose? My marriage friend! Why did he tell me the paper was a good one? Why did he say I would get everything that was due to me on it? Eh? He's a cheat—Charlie Red Nose! He played the cunning fox, took all my furs and tried to throw me off the scent. They're all like that—the white men!"

Alitet sat up and swore softly:

"Merkichkin!"

It was quiet in the polog. The carbide lamp shed a feeble light. Alitet glanced at the sleeping Nick and thought, "White men. They are all cheats. Their tongues wag while their heads think of deceit." His heart thudded wildly with a sense of his impotence to wreak his vengeance on Brown and on Charlie Red Nose, who had gone to the dwellers of the Upper World.

Alitet stared hard at the sprawling figure of Nick on the bed. It was very quiet in the polog. One could even hear the hot water gurgling in the fire hose. It seemed to be saying what bad people the white men were—all of them, this sleeping Nick as well.

"I guess he thinks of cheating me too. No fear, I won't take him anywhere. I have had enough. I nearly perished when I took Charlie Red Nose on my whaleboat. The spirits do not want me to take the Mericans anywhere."

Alitet glared at Nick.

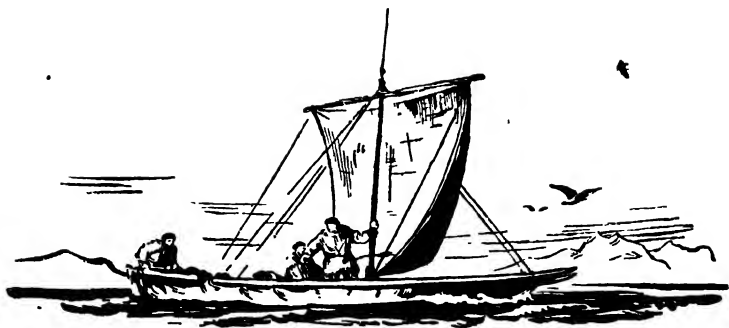
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"Maybe I should send him to the Upper Dwellers? Let Nick tell Charlie Red Nose about my great anger," Alitet thought, then buried his face in the reindeer skin. . . .

He turned over on his side and woke up all wet. He pulled off the American shirt. "I must go away!" he thought as he rubbed the muscles on his arms. "I must go away from here quick."

Alitet put on his parka over his naked body, glanced at the sleeping Nick and crawled softly out of the polog. He climbed into his sledge and set out to overtake the herdsmen whom Echavto had driven out. Didn't he have to round up his reindeer into one big herd?





PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS terrible. Very terrible. Aye saw Alitet standing over Tygrena's boy, Aivam, with a knife in his hand. Tygrena rushed forward to save her child and seized the blade. Blood spurted from her hand. She screamed, and Aye woke up.

He jumped up in alarm and began pinching himself. He sat down on the edge of the bed, still trembling with fear, then glanced around and a sigh of relief burst from him.

"Maybe my life on this Mainland is also a dream?" Aye thought, pinching himself anew.

He glanced at his bed in the semigloom. It reminded him of a broad reindeer sledge on high skids used for goods transportation. Aye inspected the bed, wondering at all these outlandish, unfamiliar things.

Next to him on a similar bed lay Andrei Zhukov, snoring lightly. Aye's glance wandered to him and he thought, "Anyway, I am not alone. I can hear Andrei breathing."

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Yes, this was not the tundra, where Aye could instantly find his bearings even in a blizzard. There he could tell North and South from the snowdrifts. The North winds piled the drifts from the sea towards the hills. There a man could always tell where he was by the direction in which the rivers and streams flowed. There you could not get lost. But here, on this Mainland, everything was shut off by high walls; even the wind had no room to pass. Here you could get lost right away. And Aye felt his complete dependence upon Andrei.

Aye climbed out of bed. The rug tickled his bare soles. Holding his breath lest he waken his friend Andrei, he quickly pulled on his socks.

A heavy velvet portiere that looked like a curtain of walrus skins divided the bedroom from the other room. Through the crack between the two halves of the portiere a sunbeam shone.

Glancing around, Aye tiptoed to the portiere and drew it aside a bit, warily, as though he were stealing up on an animal. He slipped through the opening and squinted. The light was dazzling.

"Like spring in the tundra," Aye thought. "Could even put on lookers."

Everything in the big room reminded Aye of the little Revcom house. There were windows here too, only much bigger. There were a table, chairs and benches, only broad and soft ones, as though covered with moss.

Aye walked about the room naked, in a pair of socks, closely examining every object, which he had not properly seen the previous night on account of their having come in late. There on the table was the little black speaking box. Aye was familiar with that now! Andrei had been shouting into it yesterday, talking to someone invisible. Aye wanted to pat the little box, but upon approaching the telephone he suddenly said, "Ho-ho, it's tied on a string!"

Aye could not bring himself to pat it. He went over to the window.

The town made a noise which was like the sound of the surf. Aye looked through the window. A lot of ships stood in the roadstead of Golden Horn Bay. He looked down from the height of the third floor and saw a little house—a streetcar—running along with a clatter—and a big black beetle—an auto—was trying to race it. Aye leaned out of the window and his head began to reel. He stood watching the streetcar and auto until they disappeared from view.

"What a big and noisy Russian settlement," Aye thought in amazement.

Tearing himself away from the window at last, he crossed the room and stopped before a picture hanging on the wall. The picture represented a fire. Dwellings were enveloped in long tongues of flame, and men with guns in their hands ran through the smoke. War.

"Aye!" Andrei called out. "Are you up already?"

"Yes, yes," Aye answered, delighted to hear Andrei's voice, and he ran up to the portiere.

Andrei came out.

"What are you going about naked for?"

"It's warm in here, like a polog."

"All right, let's go into the bath."

"Again?"

"Yes."

"Must I go too?"

"Of course."

"If I keep dipping myself in water I'll turn into a seal," said Aye.

After the bath Aye went up to Andrei with a necktie in his hand. "Must I throw this noose around my neck again?"

"Absolutely," Andrei said. "It's the law in this town."

Aye arrayed himself and then strutted across the

room. He even put his hands behind his back the way Andrei did. Passing a large mirror, he surreptitiously stuck his tongue out.

Aye had changed beyond recognition. He was immaculately dressed in a well-fitting blue suit, his hair no longer stood up on end, but was tamed into a smooth Russian haircut; a white shirt set off his swarthy face, and he now wore shoes in place of the high fur boots in which he had arrived. A man had brought them into the room, and Aye could not for the life of him understand why the man had brought him these shoes. Their soles were hard, as though made of wood.

"You couldn't run about after the herd all day in boots like these," thought Aye, inspecting the toes of his new shoes.

"What an elegant fellow you've become, Aye," Andrei said, regarding him with admiration. "We'll have something to eat now and then go in search of Los' wife. You must be very hungry, I suppose."

"No. I don't feel hungry any more."

"Do you see that button? You just press it, and a man will come in at once."

"No, he won't," Aye said, incredulous.

A man came noiselessly into the room. Andrei ordered breakfast, and the man bowed and withdrew.

Aye ran up to the button and examined it.

"Look! It's like a fish eye!" he cried and pressed the button.

The man reappeared and stood in the middle of the room waiting for orders. Aye stared at him open-mouthed.

"Well, Aye, what do you want? Speak. You called him," Andrei said.

Aye shook his head in considerable confusion and said in an awed voice:

"I don't want anything."

Aye had sausage for breakfast: flabby meat it was for the teeth, nothing like walrus flesh, but it was edible for all that. He drank a glass of tea and said:

"Andrei, may I have some more tea?"

"Just press that 'fish eye' and you'll get as much as you want. The man will bring it."

"I guess he won't listen to me."

"Why not? Press the button."

The man came in. Aye plucked up his courage. "Tea," he said courteously. "May I have some tea?"

Aye stood for a long time lost in admiration of the "fish eye."

"Andrei, is this your yarang?" Aye asked.

"No. This is a house for travellers, Aye. Like Rynteu's, do you remember the travellers' yarang he had?"

There came a knock at the door. Andrei got up to meet a woman.

"May I see Andrei Mikhailovich Zhukov?" she asked.

"That's me."

"Oh, how do you do!" she cried joyfully. "I am the wife of Nikita Sergeyevich Los."

"Natalia Semyonovna!" Andrei exclaimed, wringing her hand warmly. "We were just going to look for you."

"I've been on the *Soviet* already. Captain Lyadov told me you moved over to the hotel yesterday evening. You know, I've been walking up and down here about an hour. I thought you'd still be sleeping."

"Come in, Natalia Semyonovna, come in. Let me introduce Aye. He was a herdsman with the reindeer breeders."

Natalia Semyonovna gave Aye her hand and regarded him with interest.

"This man, Natalia Semyonovna, saved Nikita Sergeyevich and me from certain death. We fell over a precipice, our dogs ran away and we were left alone in the tundra. He helped us. His name is Aye."

Natalia Semyonovna threw Aye a grateful look and shook his hand again in silence.

"Aye, do you know who this is? It's Los' wife," Andrei said. "Sit down, Natalia Semyonovna, sit down."

Aye could not tear his eyes away from the face of this woman, the wife of the man whom he considered to be the biggest of all Russian chiefs. This small, muscular white-faced woman had shaken him by the hand and looked in his eyes with a kind smile. She had on a white dress. One would think there was snow all round and she intended going out to hunt. She wore funny boots. It was inconceivable how she managed to stand on them. Her black hair was streaked with grey, but her hazel eyes looked young and bright. Aye noticed all these things in a flash.

"Well, what should I begin with, comrades?" Natalia Semyonovna said. "I have so many questions that I don't know what to ask first."

"Nikita Sergeyevich is feeling fine. He's busy up to his ears, but he misses you. And he's expecting you, Natalia Semyonovna. We have a fine house there now and a lot of interesting work. The people out there are wonderful, Natalia Semyonovna!"

"Andrei Mikhailovich, come down with me to the country. I'm staying there for the summer. It's very nice out there. Woods and flowers. We'll take a stroll and have a chat. The train will get us there in a jiffy."

"Very good! And Aye will see a woods. There are no woods in Chukotsk. But why go by train? We will order a car. Aye, press the 'fish eye.'"

Aye quickly ran over and pressed the button without letting go his finger.

Andrei laughed. "Take your finger away, Aye, quick, or the bell won't stop ringing."

They went out of the hotel. A beetle already stood at the entrance.

Andrei opened the driver's door and said:

"You sit here, Aye, and look through the window."

"And where will you sit?" Aye asked nervously.

"We'll sit behind you."

"I'd better sit with you. I'm afraid to sit by myself."

"There's nothing to be afraid of, Aye!"

"We can sit here all three," Natalia Semyonovna said.

The car slid away smoothly, and Aye clutched Andrei. It raced along like a wild reindeer. One of the moving little houses, clanging noisily, popped out from behind a corner and rushed straight at the car. Aye leapt up and hit the ceiling with his head. Andrei pulled him back into his seat. The car ran out of the town and flew still more swiftly along the shore of Amur Bay. It seemed to Aye as though the sea were rushing to meet them. He calmed down at the sight of the hill-bordered bay.

When they reached the woods and got out, Aye walked round the car, thinking, "It would be good to hunt wolves on this! They wouldn't escape."

"Well, Comrade Aye, do you like our Vladivostok?" Natalia Semyonovna asked.

"Yes, it's nice. But in the tundra it's better," Aye answered. "It's quiet there. Here the noise crawls into your ears and the smoke into your nose."

Aye threw his head back and began examining a tall thick pine tree of great age.

During his first few days on the Mainland Aye had received so many impressions that he was tired of wondering at everything he saw.

Andrei and Aye soon left for Moscow to report to the Northern Committee.

They travelled an immense distance, measuring tens of thousands of kilometres, by steamer, train and by

motor. And now, when they were back again in Vladivostok, Aye said:

"Andrei, you and I live like the wind."

Aye now spoke fluent Russian. In Moscow they had appointed him assistant to Zhukov, who had been placed in charge of the Chukotsk cultural service base construction job. They both lived in Natalia Semyonovna's apartment, and all three were waiting impatiently for the opening of northern navigation to go out to the rugged but alluring shores of the Chukotsk land.

Andrei kept an eye on the manufacture of the houses and ordered school supplies, hospital equipment and various furniture. Aye studied for a license to pilot the cutter that was to be sent out to Chukotsk. He had become so used to the city and found his way around so well that he strolled everywhere by himself. In his leisure hours he visited the stores, motion picture houses and the parks, which were full of promenaders.

He now was able to run the cutter independently; he called himself the captain of a little steamer. The cutter had been bought for the Chukotsk cultural service base and was in Andrei's charge. At dinner one day Andrei proposed a ride in Amur Bay in it. Aye seconded the idea with glee. Anything connected with the sea always made him happy. He looked forward impatiently to Sunday.

On Sunday some ten men—building workers and schoolteachers who were also to set out for Chukotsk—gathered at the landing. They were all gay. Aye had already made friends with these men. He proudly took up his post at the wheel. The cutter sped across the bay, and Aye, looking straight ahead, thought about his sea, about how he would drive this cutter along his Chukotsk coast. There the spring walrus season was now beginning....

CHAPTER TWO

One-eyed Liok walked round the hull of the new bidarka. It looked like the skeleton of some gigantic extinct animal. Liok had been gathering timber for the building of the new bidarka for many years. Not everyone could build a boat like that. But then was not Liok a skilled master? The bidarka had to possess a good lifting capacity and had to be light and seaworthy. All winter Liok had lovingly and unhurriedly smoothed away every little unevenness in the timber ribs with a knife and had carefully drilled little holes through which the binding straps were to pass. The bidarka measured fifteen paces from stem to stern. The main beam, which served as the keel, was made of birchwood, and from this the side beams curved up towards the bow and stern, being lashed together with carefully-made cross-pieces. All this formed the bottom of the bidarka. At the sides, in an inclined position, stood the ribs framed on top by rings. All the component parts of the hull had been finished with a single tool—a knife. It would not be correct to say that Liok built the bidarka without calculation. He may not have worked it out on paper, but he certainly had done so in his head.

The hull was now ready. Liok walked round it with a sense of great satisfaction and triumph. He approached the hull from all sides, surveyed it close-up and then from a distance.

At length he called out to the hunters to bring up the wet covering, which was sewn together to the size of the hull out of new walrus skins. Five men ran to the pit and began quickly pulling the skins out of the water. Throwing them onto their shoulders they dragged them towards the hull. Liok himself spread out the covering, then said:

“Draw it onto the hull.”

The skeleton of the bidarka was soon hidden under the walrus covering. The skins of this covering were sewn together with a special closed stitch. There were slits at the edges through which thick walrus thongs passed as far as the side beams of the boat's bottom. The thongs were drawn taut and the bidarka assumed its natural appearance.

Liok picked up an oar, swung it back and hit the side of the boat a resounding blow. The walrus skin twanged like a gigantic drum.

"Draw it a bit tighter at the stern," Liok said.

The men, legs braced, pulled the thongs with all their strength.

"Ready. Now carry the bidarka nearer to the sea."

Eight men put their shoulders under the boat's sides and dragged it down to the beach, while Liok sauntered off in the direction of the promontory. He walked in a leisurely, casual sort of way. To all outward appearances he had nothing else to do. But as a matter of fact he was bent on a very important errand.

The hunters living across the ravine took alarm when they saw him, and began running from yarang to yarang as though a white bear had made his appearance in the settlement. They instantly guessed what Liok was about. Suddenly one of the hunters darted out of the crowd and ran to the trading post.

He said to Anna Ivanovna breathlessly:

"Ai-ai, Anna! Liok has gone to see if the walruses are passing, and Rusakov is still not here. Our hunters are not here either. Eight men went away with him to trade among the nomads. Ai-ai! Liok knows when the walruses are coming."

Anna, as both children and adults called her, understood the hunter's anxiety and said reassuringly:

"Don't worry, they will soon come back. Don't they know that the walrus hunt is soon starting?"

"Yes, yes, they know, but where are they?"

Indeed, the hunting season was already drawing near. Everybody knew that. Even the dogs sensed it. They dashed frequently to the beach and with raised muzzles drew in the smell of the sea.

School was suspended, since the pupils had declared the day before:

"Anna, enough learning. The walrus hunt will soon start."

And despite all her persuasion that they not give up school and study until the hunters set out to sea, the children did not attend class. From early morning on they scampered about on the beach, hunting ducks and fishing with nets. Everybody was in high spirits. The ringing voices of the children carried through the warm spring air.

One-eyed Liok, like an old fox covering up its tracks, came to the foot of the promontory, and to the surprise of the hunters who stood watching him, he sat down on the beach instead of climbing the rocks, and began throwing pebbles into the water.

The shore ice had retreated and the sea was calm. It was always calm when the almost never-setting sun made its appearance.

Liok sat for a long time throwing pebbles into the sea and admiring the rings they made, then suddenly he disappeared. Crawling flat on his stomach, like a walrus creeping out to rest on the rocks, he clambered up-hill.

The huge promontory consisted of granite boulders of all sizes. They were strewn about in disorder, as though the devil himself had been playing skittles here. The rocks were black, with here and there grey patches of lichen that had attached itself to them in some unfathomable manner.

Liok climbed long up the rocks until he reached the

top. He found a stone with a flat surface warmed by the sun, took off his parka and spread it on the stone, then stretched himself out on it with his face towards the sea. From the height of this promontory he commanded a good view all round. The rock-bound coast ran away to right and left. Far out at sea drifted sparse ice fields. Liok studied them and determined that they were drifting slowly from the southeast to the northwest. "The walruses should come with these ice fields," he thought. He pulled out his tobacco pouch and began crumbling some papusha. He filled his pipe and lit up, keeping his eye glued all the time on the sea.

Half a day passed, but Liok still lay on the stone. It occurred to him that it wouldn't be bad to have a cup of tea and at least a bite of seal meat. He was making up his mind to go home when a familiar sound suddenly reached his ears. He started up, took off his cap and squatted down on his heels, keeping a sharp lookout.

Yes, it was the distant roar of the walrus herd, it was not visible yet, but Liok knew that the walruses lay floating in pairs on the floes in order to save their strength. He scanned the floes intently with his single eye. The roar of the walruses grew louder and louder.

Liok scrambled down the granite slope, leaping from rock to rock, and ran toward the settlement. At the foot of the promontory he regained his composure. When his breathing was even he started out for his yarang with a gait that gave no indication of his mood. He went along at a leisurely pace, for he had calculated that the walruses would be opposite the settlement late in the afternoon. He walked past the yarangs of the artel hunters with an important air, descended into the ravine and came up on the other side. Here he halted and gazed into the tundra. Then he climbed onto a boulder standing outside his yarang and yelled at the top of his voice:

"Walruse-e-es!"

Men came running instantly out of their yarangs. Liok shouted again, "Walruses!" and forgetting about tea and food, he ran down the path leading to the beach, where the new bidarka stood ready. Close on his heels ran the hunters, dragging the hunting tackle—harpoons, air bladders, guns, and the boat sail.

Liok stepped round the bidarka and examined the watertight seams. Then he swung back the oar and struck the side with all his might. A deep twang reverberated loudly through the settlement, a signal that the walrus hunting had commenced. This was the largest bidarka in the settlement. It was capable of lifting four walruses.

"Look sharp, launch the bidarka!" Liok shouted in a loud, imperious tone.

The hunters launched the bidarka, and it lay rocking gently on the surface of the sea. Using their paddles, they swung it round stern to the shore, where old Liok stood amid a crowd of boys, women and old men. He jumped into the bidarka, sat down in the stern and took the tiller. He sat with the majestic air of an important man, his head raised high, gazing straight before him.

The bidarka put off from the shore. There was a flash of long oars being swiftly fitted into the leather rowlocks.

"Parkas off!" Liok commanded loudly.

The hunters stripped. Their muscles rippled as they strained at the oars, taking smooth swift strokes under Liok's commands: "A-ha! A-ha! A-ha!" Soon the bidarka was lost to view.

The artel hunters, too, became busy about their bidarka. It was a small boat that could not lift more than one small walrus at a time. The more experienced hunters had gone away with Rusakov, and the launching of the bidarka lacked the smooth efficiency with which Liok had put out to sea.

Anna Ivanovna came running here too, inwardly scolding Rusakov for having detained the men in the hills at such a time. She was anxious to help the hunters.

"Why don't you go out on the whaleboat, comrades? There it stands."

"No, it's too heavy, and the motor man has gone away with Rusakov as well," one of the hunters grumbled.

By the time the artel hunters launched their boat, quick firing could be heard out at sea. Liok and his men were already in at the kill.

Liok killed nine walruses. They were dragged out onto the drifting floes, which rocked under the tremendous weight of the dark-brown bleeding carcasses of the sea beasts. Upon Liok's orders the hunters stowed away great chunks of walrus meat in the bidarka.

"Dress the fourth walrus. That's all right, the bidarka will take it," he said in a tone of proud confidence.

The hunters sharpened their knives with a will as they made ready to carry out Liok's order. He kept urging them to hurry, for it was ten kilometres to the shore and they had to land the meat and return for the rest of the carcasses.

The heavily-laden bidarka made for the shore and met the outgoing boat of the artel hunters.

"Ehei!" Liok shouted. "The walruses have gone. There are no more walruses to be seen. In three days there will be more."

Liok was telling the truth. The migration of the main herd had not yet begun. The few vagrants that had passed Liok had killed, and now no more walruses could be expected for three or four days. The artel hunters turned back. Though their bidarka was empty they were unable to keep up with Liok's bidarka. The latter made swift progress. The successful hunt gave new strength to the oarsmen.

Liok quickly unloaded and put out again for the rest of the carcasses.

The ice fields, however, had shifted, and when Liok got back to them there was no sign of the killed walruses. Liok tacked among the floes until morning, searching for the quarry. At dawn the bidarka was surrounded by ice, and Liok ordered the men to drag it out onto the ice field. The hunters themselves were now drifting in a northwesterly direction, like the killed walruses. Liok climbed a tall hummock to make observations.

"Take the bidarka on your shoulders and follow me!" he cried.

He walked in the direction of the shore. Eight hunters carried the bidarka to the edge of the ice, staggering under the weight.

When the bidarka slipped into the water, Liok said:

"We must go home. It's a pity to lose those five walruses. But never mind. We shall kill some more. One walrus on the beach is worth ten at sea."

Arriving on shore in high spirits, Liok went to the trading post.

"Anna," he said. "The artel whaleboat sleeps, the motor sleeps, and I have brought in four walruses. Liok was right when he said that he would kill a lot of walruses." At this he thumped his chest importantly.

"Come into the room, Liok, and I will give you tea—strong tea," Anna Ivanovna invited him.

"Come on, come on," Liok said with a smile.

He deposited himself firmly in a bentwood chair and eyed the Russian woman with a glance of mockery.

"Why do you look at me like that, Liok?"

"I saw you seeing off the artel bidarka. You didn't come to see me off, though I am the best hunter," the old man said in an offended tone.

"I wanted to, Liok, but you went out so quickly that I missed you. You must help the artel people out with

meat, Liok. Everybody has run out of meat, you know."

Liok smiled, sipped his tea, and said:

"I gave orders for two walrus carcasses to be given to the folks on this side of the ravine. What with their motor, they may be left without food."

"Oh, you are a good man, Liok!"

"Of course I am," he magnanimously agreed.

CHAPTER THREE

Spring set in. Rusakov came home on the last snow trail. In two and a half months he had made the round of numerous encampments and established good relations with the reindeer breeders. He was given a friendly reception everywhere as the most welcome of guests.

Good word of the Russian merchant flew from one nomad encampment to another. True, some people thought Rusakov foolish, because he did not know the value of his wares. He gave away too many goods for one pelt. He even paid as much as a package of cartridges and a brick of tea for a reindeer skin, which everyone knew wasn't worth anything. Nobody had ever traded like that before, oh dear, no! It was a pity, though, that he didn't bring liquor.

The hill people—nomad reindeer breeders—were the most backward section of the Chukotsk population. Their nomad mode of life made the organization of the Soviet system very difficult. Still and all, word of the new life and the new law had penetrated there as well.

Rusakov was not merely a trader: while exchanging goods for pelts he pondered over ways and means of organizing the Soviet system in the hills. He saw how Tribal Soviets in the nomad encampments fell apart and vanished without a trace the day after the departure of the Revcom man who had set them up. The hill folk lived

according to their own laws and conducted a natural economy: they seemed to think of nothing but reindeer, and they promptly forgot all talk about remaking life on a new foundation.

The travelling store had been Rusakov's own idea, and he was highly pleased with the results of the trip.



He was disconcerted, however, by the fact that during that time the ninety-six dogs harnessed to eight sledges had eaten more than six hundred reindeer.

"Why, that's a whole herd!" Rusakov reflected on the trip home. "That's too costly. That way we can kill off the reindeer. We'll have to go over to reindeer teams, which procure their own fodder. And the Soviet system here has to be organized through the trading system. Through cooperatives of middle reindeer breeders."

When Rusakov arrived home, Anna Ivanovna met him with a reproach.

"You've gone crazy!" she said. "Walrus hunting has started and you went off to the hills and took the hunters with you."

"Have the walruses shown up?" Rusakov asked eagerly.

"Of course they have. Liok is going about taunting the artel members. 'The whaleboat sleeps, the motor sleeps'—he keeps saying all the time. You organized the artel and you yourself are breaking it up."

"Y-y-you're right. But we must have the S-s-s-oviet system in the hills as well, mustn't we? The amount of work there is to do there!"

Anna Ivanovna flared up. "There isn't even any real Soviet system on the coast, among the settled population and you're talking about the hills. First show them here what the Soviet system is."

"War is waged on all s-s-sectors at the s-s-same time, and not on one. A cooperative is n-n-needed there. An offensive always has to be w-w-waged on all fronts at the same time."

"Offensive! Liok has made a killing of walruses while you dragged the whole artel out to the nomad camps. Their relatives are going about the coast paying you little compliments. There's a cooperative for you!"

Rusakov jumped up and rushed out to find the motorist Tevliankow, whom Osipov had trained. He was not in his yarang. All the hunters, upon returning from the hills, had dropped the dogs and instantly put out to sea in the bidarka. The whaleboat and the motor might not have existed for all they cared.

Rusakov felt nettled that the men had gone out hunting without telling him.

"Now what do you say to that! They still look on the motor as a kind of amusement!" he said, scanning the sea.

Liok, with a bunch of sea cabbage in his hands, came towards him down the beach, at the water's edge.

"H-h-h-ello, Liok," said Rusakov. "W-w-why aren't you out hunting?"

"I guess Liok has grown lazy," the old man answered with a sly smile.

"Don't beat about the bush, Liok."

"There aren't any walruses today," he said seriously with a shake of the head.

"Then why did the a-a-artel men go out hunting?"

"Ha, ha! They want to make up for lost time. The artel hunters have gone to pick up what Liok has thrown away. I left five walruses on the floes yesterday..."

There suddenly came the throbbing of a motor. A whaleboat hove in sight round the cliff. It sailed down like a white swan on a mountain lake. Liok fell silent, fixing his keen eye on the whaleboat.

He noticed, while the boat was still far out, that it contained only women. It bore down swiftly, though no one made any strokes with the oars. The steady throbbing of the motor resounded along the coast.

"Who is that?" Rusakov asked.

"I think it's Vaamcho sitting at the rudder," Liok said in a tone of surprise. He strode quickly nearer to the water's edge.

The motor suddenly stopped, and the whaleboat swung round, slackened speed and closed with the land.

"Rusakov!" Dvorkin, the schoolteacher, shouted from the whaleboat.

Rusakov rushed forward to meet him. Dvorkin jumped out onto the shingle and shook his hand, smiling. He had not seen any Russians for a long time.

Vaamcho walked up to them with an unhurried gait and gravely held his hand out to Rusakov. Liok stood watching him with narrowed eye.

"Ho! He has learnt to move hands up and down!" thought Liok. He went up closer to the whaleboat.

"We've come for gasoline, Rusakov," Dvorkin said gaily. "Must make a stock before the hunting season begins."

"There will soon be walruses," Vaamcho added.

Liok surveyed the whaleboat and the women in it, then said in a mocking tone, with a jerk of his head.

"Taking a joy ride?"

"No," Wakat answered gravely. "Vaamcho told us to come in case there would be walruses on the way. We might have to do some hunting."

"Oho! I don't remember ever having seen such a brave lot of women! You'll scare all the walruses away with your wide sleeves. I guess you've mixed up walruses with fellows, eh?" and Liok rounded it off with such a gay piece of indelicacy that all the women burst out laughing.

Vaamcho came running up.

"Ehei, my friend Rusakov invites all the women to tea Tea with biscuits!" he cried.

Liok turned his eye in Vaamcho's direction, and, under the impression that Vaamcho was lying, he asked sarcastically:

"Since when is he your friend? The mountain ram's your friend."

"All the Russians living on the coast are my friends So the teacher told me," Vaamcho retorted perkily.

"And is Los your friend too?"

"Sure he is!" Vaamcho said, and proudly throwing back his head he strode off with the women to the trading post.

Although Liok did have a reputation on the coast of being a great hunter and bidarka craftsman who was looked up to by all the hunters, Vaamcho had changed his opinion about him. This circumstance was

led up to by a conversation which Vaamcho had had with Alitet.

Alitet had said that Liok was his pal, because he was a man who resembled the lead dog in a team—he knew the way of life. People would never be able to get along without Liok and Alitet.

Vaamcho had not liked Alitet's boasting. He had grown angry then and said, "We'll get along all right. We'll find the way ourselves, without you and without Liok, your pal." That is why Vaamcho was so disrespectful to Liok at this meeting.

Liok stood on the beach gazing after Vaamcho with a look of disapproval. Then he turned sharply towards the whaleboat, squatted down on his heels and began taking stock of it.

"If this boat runs as fast after the walruses, Liok is going to have a bad time," he thought. "But does Vaamcho know life as Liok knows it? Oho, men like Liok are very few on the coast. Who can make a bidarka like I? No one."

Then he, too, bent his steps to the trading post.

The boat women were drinking tea on two big cases outside the warehouse. Anna Ivanovna was entertaining them. Liok heard their merry laughter when still at a distance. This was the first time the women of Vaamcho's artel were seeing a white-faced woman, and Anna Ivanovna was the innocent cause of their merriment.

Liok caught a glimpse of a bidarka out at sea—it belonged to the hunters' artel on this side of the ravine.

"Empty. Riding high," Liok said to himself. He sat down on the ledge of a rock and followed the approaching bidarka with his eyes.

Tevliankow sprang ashore first. He ran to the trading post without noticing Liok.

From the occupants of the bidarka who ran past him towards the trading post Liok learned that they had re-

turned because they had seen Vaamcho's whaleboat coming in.

Burning with curiosity, Liok too went to Rusakov.

"Anna, where are the men?" he asked.

"They are in the room."



"Vaamcho and Tevliankow as well?"

"They are all there, Liok."

"H'm, also friends," Liok said to himself, thinking of Vaamcho and Tevliankow. Ordinarily, Liok would have kept at a respectable distance from such company, but he now threw self-respect to the winds and walked in silence to the house. He had never entered Rusakov's house so irresolutely before.

He opened the door and stopped there, leaning against the doorjamb. Tevliankow and the guests sat at the table

drinking tea. At the same table Liok had sat on more than one occasion.

"S-s-s-it down, Liok," said Rusakov.

From outside came a cry of "Walruses! Walruses!"

Everybody ran out. The men stood listening to the roar of a huge herd of walruses.

Liok dashed off to his bidarka. His hunters had already set it afloat, and he sprang into it at a running jump.

The motorist Tevliankow ran to his whaleboat, but Vaamcho stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Tevliankow, there's no hurry. Liok won't kill all the walruses. Do you hear them roaring? We haven't come to an arrangement."

Tevliankow looked at Vaamcho in blank surprise.

"We must hold a meeting of your artel and ours."

"Come, come, Vaamcho!" the teacher interposed. "This is no time for meetings! We must put out at once!"

"A little meeting. Maybe we'll hunt together on two whaleboats. We must tell the women about it."

On the beach, beside the whaleboat, Vaamcho spoke to the hunters about joint hunting, and while this talk was going on, while the motor was being fitted into place and fuelled and the tackle stowed into the boats, the sound of rifle shots was heard out at sea. Liok had already started the hunt.

The meeting over, the two whaleboats got under way. When they approached the ice, where the hunt was going on, Liok was on his way back loaded up with walrus carcasses. The whaleboats sped past the bidarka, and Liok, who was sitting in the stern, stood up and shouted out something.

Vaamcho swung the whaleboat round sharply and caught up with the bidarka

"What did you say, Liok?"

"I left three walruses out there!... You can take them!... A present to your artel!" Liok shouted.

"We'll kill all we need ourselves. We don't need your presents," Dvorkin answered.

The teacher stood on the prow holding a rifle. The women stared hard at the sea for a walrus to make its appearance. Wakal held the harpoon ready. She had a strong sure arm and would not miss it.

Tevlianow had agreed to the joint hunting on the condition that the women's artel kill as many walruses as the men's.

Vaamcho's whaleboat ran into a small herd of walruses. Four of them swam past with their ugly heads thrust out of the water. Two shots rang out in quick succession—from the bow and from the stern. Simultaneously the harpoon was thrown and went home. The walrus dragged the inflated seal bag after it.

The whaleboat swiftly hunted down the retreating quarry, and soon all four walruses hung limp on the floats. The women, the teacher and Vaamcho quickly dressed the carcasses.

"Let's get ashore, quick, Vaamcho," the teacher said. "We'll take one walrus in tow."

The whaleboat overtook Liok before it reached the shore. His hunters were rowing with might and main, their dark-brown bodies shining with perspiration.

"Ehei! Liok! See if you can catch up to us!" Vaamcho shouted, and showed him the tip of a thong, which meant: "Hitch on to my towline."

Liok turned away. In token of his wrathful indignation he ordered his men to stop rowing.

The women, sitting along the sides, giggled.

Liok's bidarka was soon overtaken by the second whaleboat, which was also loaded with walruses.

The whaleboat crews managed to make two trips by the time Liok got back to the ice fields. Disturbed by the

shooting, the walruses quitted the ice, and the hunting continued on the water.

Liok stood up in the bidarka watching Tevliankow, whose whaleboat was heading not where a walrus that had dived was going but in the opposite direction. Tevliankow was not yet as experienced a hunter as Liok.

Liok waxed indignant. "Ai-ai! What a bad hunter!"

Tevliankow spotted the walrus when it came to the surface far away. He turned the whaleboat about and quickly caught up with it. Shots rang out at once. Rusakov fired too.

The hunting lasted until night.

It turned out to be very successful. The whaleboat ran fine! No bidarka had ever brought ashore thirty-two walruses in a single day! Such hunting had never been seen in these parts. Tevliankow, who had had his doubts about the whaleboat, was now elated. He continued to sit in it when all the others had climbed out, and stroked the motor, purring words of praise, as he would to an intelligent lead dog.

Even the women's artel under Vaamcho brought in as many as twenty-five walruscs. The entire beach on this side of the ravine was strewn with meat. People ran busily to and fro. The dogs gorged themselves with walrus blood.

On the opposite side of the ravine, however, everything was still. Here only eight walruses lay on the beach. Liok did not even want to look at the other side. He tried to stand with his back to it, as if to say that he saw nothing remarkable there. The old man was painfully aware of his defeat. Not to aggravate his feelings he quitted the beach and went into his yarang.

The fame of the great hunter and skilful craftsman—the builder of bidarkas—faded in a single day.

Liok sat in his polog drinking tea and brooding over the whaleboat, the thought of which gave him no peace.

"I shall make a whaleboat like that myself. . . . Yes, but where shall I get the boards? . . . And I don't 'suppose I could make a motor!" he reflected.

Liok recalled the bearded chief Los, recalled his words about remaking life, the American matches and the Russian papusha tobacco. "And the whaleboat? What a whaleboat! Eh? How many walruses even the women killed! . . . And Tevliankow? Is he a hunter? Does he know life and the habits of the beasts better than I do? The motor brings him right up to the nose of the walrus! Let him try to keep up with me on a bidarka. . . . They are gay now, those people on the other side of the ravine. I guess they are making fun of Liok."

The old man bade Tevliankow to be called to him.

Tevliankow came at once.

"Liok," he said, "I guess you want the two walruses which you gave our artel? We shall give you back four. You haven't got many of them."

Liok frowned, narrowed his eye and spat into a little spittle box made of birch bark. He had a mind to drive Tevliankow out, but he controlled himself and said:

"That is not what I called you for." Then looking up at him he said, "I want to ask you—are you a better hunter than I? Eh?"

Tevliankow was silent.

"Or do you know life more than I? Eh?"

"You are the best hunter, Liok. All the people know that. In our group only the motor is a very good hunter," Tevliankow said.

"Motor?" Liok queried. "Yes, it hunts well. I was watching it all the time. I guess it is difficult to outdo the motor."

"Lick, when we went out trading among the nomads, we found a motor at Hot Springs. Nick the Merican lived there. We waited for him two days, but we were running short of food for the dogs. That motor is now in

Rusakov's warehouse. He said: if Liok was in the artel we could fix that motor to his bidarka. It will go faster than the whaleboat. So Rusakov said."

Liok sprang to his feet. His eye glinted up. "I guess he thinks right. My bidarka is strong and light."

"Only our artel has taken that motor too. That is how it is, Liok," Tevliankow said.

The old man became thoughtful. He crumbled some papusha into his pipe, lit up, then said in a tone of finality:

"I shall join the artel. And all my hunters shall join it. Do you think the motor can be stuck into my bidarka? The whaleboat has a hole made in it for the motor."

"Rusakov said the motor could be slung behind the stern of your bidarka. He said it would run very well. Only a board must be fastened to it with big nails."

"No. You mustn't use nails. I can lash it down firmly with straps."

Tevliankow was very pleased that Liok now wanted to join the artel. Everybody knew that Liok was the most experienced hunter in the settlement. The fact that the old man had made up his mind to follow the trail of the new life delighted him beyond words. It was clear to everybody that the artel needed the advice of such a man. Tevliankow said gaily:

"Come, Liok, let us go to Rusakov."

"No, no, wait a minute. You are the motor man, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am!" Tevliankow answered proudly.

"And I myself shall be the chairman of the artel. There. Because you are young and it is not fitting that I should take orders from you."

"Very well, Liok, I agree. Only we must make a meeting. It's the new law. The meeting chose me. Now let it choose you."

"There is no need for a meeting. Why should they choose? Do not people know what a great hunter I am? You tell them that I will be chairman of the artel."

"You tell them that yourself, Liok. They will all want to choose you chairman."

The old man pondered this, then said:

"All right, let there be a meeting. But don't call the Enmakai women to it. It's not seemly for women to meddle with men's hunting business." Then, after a pause, he added, "If what you say is true—that the motor will drive my bidarka swiftly, we shall hunt this way: I shall take the best shots and harpooners from your artel and give you in exchange the less skilled of my men for your whaleboat. I shall do the killing, and you on your whaleboat will carry the walruses home. It is heavy, your whaleboat, and we can hitch the small bidarka to it."

"Very good, Liok, very good!" Tevliankow assented gladly.

"Go and call the men to the meeting," Liok commanded.

CHAPTER FOUR

Geologist Dyagilev intended spending only the summer in the hills, but he remained there for the winter. Accustomed as he was to living out in the open, he roamed from camp to camp, working on the topography of this vast unexplored district. He was preparing material for a schematic geological map, pursuing the immediate narrow aim of providing preliminary data for future expeditions which would carry out the necessary chain surveys. The reindeer breeders willingly conveyed him from place to place, since Dyagilev gave them written notes to the nearest trading post, in exchange for which his guides received tobacco and cartridges. He lived the life of a reindeer nomad, ate the same food as

they did and dressed in the same light, warm and comfortable clothes they wore.

In the course of his winter travels he spent nearly a month living with the Sablers, about whom he had already informed Los. Dyagilev was deeply resentful of the fact that American intruders had penetrated the country. He had found traces of them on more than one occasion.

Towards spring Dyagilev decided to make for the coast, work up his notes at the Revcom and send a brief report by radio to his headquarters.

Coming down from the hills he learned from his guide that there was an American living at Hot Springs. Dyagilev was interested to know what he was doing there. He told the guide to drive him down to Hot Springs.

Mr. Nick was in his shanty. Preoccupied with plans for returning to Alaska, he had gone to consult Sabler on this problem which was of no little importance to him. He could not get out on the whaleboat alone. Alitet had suddenly decamped. Sabler, on the other hand, proved to be the ball that runs itself to the player. He was none too enamoured of the prospect of meeting Los again and going back to the Mainland, to Soviet Russia. Nick and Sabler quickly came to an understanding. And so, Nick now had guests in his shanty—Vadim Petrovich Sabler and his wife, Valentina Yurievna. As soon as the river became navigable they would sail down to the estuary, and from there it was but a stone's throw to America. The three of them could row out even to San Francisco. Sabler's anxiety to slip away to America fitted in with Mr. Nick's plans, for Sabler possessed interesting material, and to "sell" this "freedom-loving" Russian engineer might bring grist to his mill.

When Mr. Nick brought his guests home he instantly noticed the disappearance of the motor.

"Who the devil could have pinched my motor?" Mr. Nick exclaimed, hands on hips and sturdy legs wide apart.

"I wonder if it wasn't that squint-eyed Charlie who came down again while I was away? He might think it'd come in handy."

"Don't worry, Mr. Nick," Sabler said. "I shouldn't think the motor is of any value to us without fuel."

"There's one tin of gasoline left, lying near the whale-boat. Quite enough to put on speed with in a critical moment."

"Nonsense! The river will open up in a few days and the swift current will carry us out into the ocean. It wouldn't be a bad idea, though, to rig up a sail."

"Dammit, we haven't got Oregon pines growing here! Where are we going to get a mast?"

"There's plenty of driftwood on the coast," Sabler said.

"You're a child, Vadim," Valentina Yurievna cut in. "You think we can go promenading about the coast looking for a mast with these Revcom men nosing about the place! I shouldn't be surprised if that hulking fellow of a militiaman is looking for us as it is. Thank God they ride about alone. We three will be able to stand up for ourselves. Don't look on me as a frail woman, Mr. Nick. I used to go in for boxing in my young days. Anyway, prudence is a cardinal virtue. We must try to avoid meeting those men."

"Goddam, we've got nothing to be afraid of. We've got strong fists and a shooting iron that works without a catch."

"We ought to slaughter a reindeer for the trip," said Valentina Yurievna.

"What for? It's warm already and the meat'll go bad on us. The case of canned goods will see us through to Alaska. By the way, missus, it's high time you took off those damned fur clothes. The sun gives enough warmth. I can offer you my spare work clothes. You're a big woman and they'll just fit you." And Mr. Nick

produced a pair of dark-blue denim overalls, a pair of excellent hiking shoes and gaiters.

"That's splendid! I want to become a civilized woman at once."

Valentina Yurievna changed clothes and presented herself before Mr. Nick.

"Well, how do I look now?"

"Missus, you're damned pretty!" Mr. Nick cried. "Don't you think so, Mr. Sabler?"

"I came to that conclusion twenty years ago," Sabler replied, smiling.

Looking at Sabler, Mr. Nick thought, "If this scrubby little guy wasn't worth so much there'd be sense to scalding and drowning him in the hot spring."

But aloud he said:

"All right, let's have some coffee."

"Vadim, you're a coffee expert. Go out to the spring and make some."

"My wife's word has always been law for me," Sabler said. He went outside.

They sat down to the table and drank coffee with thickly-buttered biscuits. Over the coffee they worked out their plan of going down to the banks of the Amguema, where the whaleboat lay waiting for them in the bushes.

Suddenly they heard voices behind the curtain of the polog. Sabler ran out and saw Dyagilev, who was writing a note for his guide.

"Ah, geologist Dyagilev!" Sabler said in a guarded tone. "What's brought you here?"

"A need for cultural intercourse. I made a detour for that express purpose. A courtesy call."

Mr. Nick came out, followed by Sabler's wife, who was no less alarmed than her husband.

"Mr. Nick," said Sabler, "please let me introduce to you Mr. Dyagilev, the Russian geologist I was telling you about."

Mr. Nick shook hands in silence.

Greeting Sabler's wife, Dyagilev said with a smile:

"And you, Valentina Yurievna, are blossoming in these snows. You look splendid in those blue overalls and the gaiters."

"Thank you. It's a man's outfit and a bit large. A gift from Mr. Nick."

Nick studied the Russian geologist's face, overgrown with a black beard.

"And what brought you here, Vadim Petrovich?" Dyagilev asked.

"Need for cultural intercourse," Sabler answered with a shrug.

Dyagilev threw a look round.

"This is a wonderful spot," he said. "Look at that beautiful snow grotto! It won't have time to melt during the summer. And these springs, I suppose, are of volcanic origin?"

"You can boil a live mammoth in them. Ninety-four degrees centigrade," Mr. Nick said. "Okay then, come inside, please."

They entered the fur polog. Valentina Yurievna sat down on the camp stool Nick sat down on the bed and invited Sabler and Dyagilev to sit down beside him.

"Thank you," Dyagilev said. "I'm an outdoor man and I'm used to reclining on reindeer skins." He sat down on the skin-carpeted floor.

Sabler sat down beside him.

"An excellent house you have, Mr. Nick. With central heating."

"We Americans are a practical people," replied Nick, who sat on the bed as erect and motionless as a statue.

"What are the results of your investigations?" Sabler asked, turning to Dyagilev.

"I am satisfied," the latter answered briefly.

"Look here, Vladimir Nikolayevich, you strike me as being a qualified geologist. An interesting idea has just occurred to me," Sabler said, raising his finger.

"What is it?" Dyagilev asked, on his guard.

"Why the devil should you work for this here Communism in such awful conditions?" Sabler made a wry face. "They won't appreciate you anyway. Vladimir Nikolayevich, those Reds are barbarians! Before the revolution I worked with an outstanding specialist establishing the law of fatigue in metals. He was a highly-gifted man. He could have won wealth and fame. And do you know what they did to him?"

"What?" Dyagilev asked sharply. He felt what was coming.

"They shot him! . . ."

"Well, what of it?" Dyagilev asked calmly. "That means he deserved it. After all, we have had a revolution, the revolution sweeps from its path everything that has outlived itself. Everybody received his deserts!"

"That friend of mine who was shot was no pawn. I think you also stand a head above the people whom you take your orders from. You received a brilliant education in Germany, you told me. Russian engineers are highly valued in America. The Amguema will open up in a few days and we and Mr. Nick are going to America. I propose that you join us."

Dyagilev raised himself slightly on his elbow, looked Sabler straight in the face and said angrily:

"Vadim Petrovich, you're a scoundrel!"

Sabler sprang to his feet with a flaming face and demanded threateningly, almost in a whisper:

"What? What was that you said?"

"I said you're a scoundrel. It's my private opinion. I class under that heading all men who sell their country for a mess of pottage, who do not love their own Russian people."



"How dare you? I'll never forgive you that!" Sabler cried in a shrill voice. "God forbid I ever ask you to forgive me."

"Come now, come now!" Valentina Yurievna cried in alarm. "What are you quarrelling about?"

Nick said soberly:

"Mr. Dyagileff! You will be able to make a lot of money in America—dollars.

The geological configuration of this peninsula is identical with that of Alaska. That's why we Americans show such an interest in this country. I have no doubt that the Americans will buy it."

"I doubt it very much," Dyagilev said.

"The Americans are businessmen," Mr. Nick went on, "and they are able to appreciate a good geologist when they see one."

"I'm not the merchandise you need, Mr. Nick. Personally, Mr. Nick, I am deeply outraged by your presence in this country. I know that Soviet Russia didn't invite you here. This is called breaking into someone else's house through the window and rummaging about in corners looking for something that doesn't belong to you. It borders on banditry, if you want to know, or rather has a direct bearing on it. As far as I'm concerned I shall do everything in my power to cut off your retreat to America."

"How do you propose going about it, Mr. Dyagileff?" Mr. Nick said with studied coolness.

Dyagilev was silent, then seeing Nick fumbling under the pillow, he whipped out a Colt and cried:

"Drop that gun!"

Nick leapt to his feet. Sabler rolled over onto his other side.

Valentina Yurievna, trying to keep calm, got up and bent over Dyagilev, murmuring in a deprecating tone:

"Vladimir Nikolayevich! My good man! What are you doing? After all, we're cultured people here!" Then she suddenly threw herself upon him and seized his hand that held the revolver. Mr. Nick and Sabler immediately hurled themselves upon him.

"Tie him up! Tie him up!" little Sabler shrieked. He seized Dyagilev's revolver and, waving it with an air of triumph, said ironically, "Did you really think you would escort us to the Revcom?"

Dyagilev lay panting. Mr. Nick sat astride him, pressing him down to the floor with his powerful hands.

"Perhaps you'll agree to go with us to America now?" Mr. Nick asked. "I don't see what other choice you have."

Dyagilev remained silent.

"Vladimir Nikolayevich! You should accept this flattering offer," Valentina Yurievna said, tying Dyagilev's legs with a length of rope.

Dyagilev looked at her and said with bitterness.

"I never imagined that you, a woman who considers herself a cultured person, could be such an adept in the methods of thugs."

Valentina Yurievna burst out laughing.

"After all, I'm a hunter!"

"Mr. Dyagileff, I'm waiting for your decision," Nick said. "I repeat, you have no other choice. All your notes will be in my hands, and dammit, I'll find a way of reporting that I bought 'em from you for twenty thousand dollars."

"Blackmail and banditism!" Dyagilev burst out indignantly. "But bear in mind that the Amguema won't open up before five days, and the militiaman Khokhlov will be here by that time."

"He will, will he!" squealed Sabler. "In that case we'll deal with you singly," and without further warning he shot Dyagilev point-blank in the forehead.

"You rat!" cried Mr. Nick turning upon Sabler.

"Damn it all, you've got no more brains than a walrus! You believed what he said about someone coming here!"

"You are not fully aware of the situation we're in, Mr. Nick. Didn't I tell you that I was ordered to report to the Revcom? I was told to my face that if I didn't come by myself the militiaman would bring me. Do you know what a giant he is? If we come across him we'll have to put a bullet between his eyes without waiting a second. Otherwise he'll catch us all!"

"You don't understand a damn thing, my good man! I've lost a lot of money on account of your silly cowardice. Even trussed up, that geologist was worth a lot. And now, dammit, all he's good for is fox bait."

"The job's done," Sabler said, "and there's no use talking about it now. When it comes to that, I'm worth something too. . . . We've got to get rid of the body quick. It's possible that the militiaman really may come here. And then it'll be harder for us to justify our action."

Three days later saw Mr. Nick and Sabler and his wife trudging through the mossy tundra carrying provisions and cloth for the boat sail. They were making their way to the banks of the Amguema where the whaleboat stood.

The river was practically clear of ice, the remnants of which were being borne out to the Arctic Ocean. It was raining—a fine spring drizzle.

CHAPTER FIVE

Omrytagen had not slept all night. It was dark in the polog, yet his eyes had not closed. His mind was in a turmoil. It was many years now since Omrytagen had taken himself a wife and acquired six dogs, yet no one had ever thought of inviting him even to the feast of the seal. And now Vaamcho had suddenly said that the bearded chief had taken it into his head to invite Omry-

tagen to the Feast of the Big Speaking. Oho! No wonder sleep would not come to his eyes!

Every day, though only too slowly, the Feast drew nearer. Every day the string of buttons grew smaller and smaller. There was now only one button left on the string. That is why Omrytagen tossed on the skins all night long.

Only towards morning did he finally fall into a sound sleep.

The rusty kettle boiled furiously over the burner and its lid rattled noisily. The woman pinched off some brick tea and threw it into the gurgling water.

"Omrytagen!" she called. "The tea has boiled!"

Omrytagen started up. His sleepy eyes stared at the wall on which hung his button calendar. He snatched it from the wall, took off the button and, now thoroughly awake, he said:

"That's all now. The last button. I must prepare to go to the Feast of the Big Speaking."

That morning witnessed an astounding event in Omrytagen's life. He lost his appetite—a thing that had never happened to him in all his years. He did not eat any seal meat, and only drank three large mugs of tea. Even those he drank hurriedly, scalding himself. He drank in silence, and only between mugs did he manage to say, "Put the meat in my bag," and, "Don't forget my spare torbazes, it is a long way to go."

Upon finishing the third mug of tea he said in a tone of pride:

"Oho! I guess Omrytagen is becoming a real man!"

He solemnly took the button, made a careful survey of it, and handing it to his wife, bade her sew that remarkable charm to his belt.

Then he put on his new sealskin trousers, smoothed out the fur stockings on his arm, placed the straw inner soles into the torbazes himself, thrust the stockings into the torbazes, and straightened out all the creases of the



sole of the stocking with his fingers right up to the toes. Now they were ready to be put on. Omrytagen leaned back on his elbows, threw his legs up in the air and said to his wife in an impressive tone:

"Tie the straps properly."

The woman swathed his leg with broad white sealskin straps and tied them in a strong knot with the aid of her teeth.

Omrytagen put on a single parka, took his bag and his staff and went out of the yarang—a conference delegate booted and spurred.

That morning the sun shone brightly. Omrytagen felt light at heart. The coast was a dark strip of shingle which ran far, far out. Snow-white gulls circled clamourously over the sea, cliff swallows winged their swift flight through the air, and farther out lay the beautiful northern sea.

Omrytagen filled his lungs with the fresh air after the stuffy polog, and said:

"Oho! There's a flame-coloured gull."

He looked at the dog that came up and cried to his wife:

"Do not feed the dogs! Save the meat for fox bait. It is time I got myself a good rifle. Let them run in the tundra and catch mice."

"Eheil!" the voice of his wife came from inside the polog, and this meant, "So it shall be."

After leaving various other domestic instructions, Omrytagen slung the staff across his back, holding it in the crook of his arms, and walked off with a light and dignified step. Coming across a piece of charcoal lying amid the pebbles, Omrytagen stopped, picked it up and thought, "The tent stood here. Alitet made hatchets. . . . I wonder

why they didn't call Alitet to the Feast of the Big Speaking? I guess it's the new law...."

Omrytagen shook his head with a puzzled look, threw the charcoal away and left the settlement behind him.

Upon his arrival at the neighbouring settlement the next day he found Piliak sitting with a notched stick in his hand, deep in thought. Piliak looked worried and annoyed. He told Omrytagen that he was all mixed up. He couldn't make out when he had to leave for the Feast.

While Piliak had been out seal hunting, his son—a silly boy yet—had made his own notches on the stick. He had done them so cleverly that Piliak could not distinguish them from his own. It was a pretty muddle. Good that Omrytagen had passed that way, otherwise he would never have known when to set out!

Piliak quickly got ready for the journey, and they set out together.

Upon drawing near to Bird's Peak Gorge they saw a thin wisp of tobacco smoke rising above the rocks and caught sight of a figure lying amid the stones.

The figure was that of Alitet. He had come to the prearranged spot after all. He had been lying here for several days in the dim hope of meeting Mr. Brown. True, he now knew that Brown was a cheat, but he had been drawn to this gorge by some irresistible force beyond himself.

Alitet lay on a rock, scanning the calm sea. The horizon, however, was clear. Alitet's eyes ached with staring so hard and long at the sea.

Here in solitude Alitet had meditated and planned his future life. He remembered old Liok. He had turned out to be a game old man. Rumour said that he had not joined the artel, despite all persuasions. "Liok is a sensible man. If Brown deceives me this summer again I'll have to sell the Russians furs through Liok. The Russians are doing trade with him. They sell him as much as he

wants, and me they only give goods for a couple of polar fox skins. H'm. These Russians don't seem to have come here for fox skins at all. Crazy people—they don't understand that I have fox skins such as no other trapper possesses. Oho! And the amount I have! I'll send Liok a message he should pay me a visit and I'll have a big talk with him."

Alitet's eyes wandered to the cave in which the furs were hidden, and he suddenly caught sight of two men coming down the coast. Like an animal that protects her young by distracting the attention of the hunters from her lair, Alitet dashed out from the rocks and ran down to the shore. He leapt from rock to rock like a mountain ram.

Meeting Piliak and Omrytagen, he said:

"I am seeking a place for myself. I wish to move from Enmakai."

"This is a bad place," Piliak said. "Men have never lived here. Even my grandfather does not remember yarangs ever standing here. It is an evil place."

"Where are you bound?" Alitet interrupted.

"We have been called to the Feast of the Big Speaking."

"Heh! And you, Omrytagen, are going to the Speaking Feast too?" Alitet asked with a malicious grin.

He wanted to tell them that they were being fools and were only wasting the soles of their torbazes, but instead he said something quite different:

"Go, go! Go all of you. Vaamcho is also getting ready. Only take the teacher with you. They will not accept you at the Russian feast if you come without a Russian. You will go there for nothing."

The travellers nodded in agreement and went on their way.

At Enmakai they were met by Vaamcho, and they proceeded in a noisy animated group to the school-house.

"Dvorkin!" Vaamcho said, "they have come. Here they are. We can now set out!"

"Sit down, comrades, sit down," Dvorkin said cordially, drawing up chairs. "We'll have some tea and then set out. We shall go by whaleboat."

Omrytagen and Piliak were afraid to sit down; they stood there timidly, casting glances at the teacher.

"Sit down," Vaamcho said, and then sat down with an aplomb that amazed the guests.

They had tea with bread, which they regarded as a delicacy, and then Dvorkin started to get ready for the trip.

Omrytagen and Piliak had already heard about the Enmakai self-moving whaleboat: news travels quickly along the coast. And now their impatience to see this self-moving whaleboat was so great that they were even ready to refuse tea.

Tea over, Wakat, looking very important in a cotton print dress, removed the tea things. She walked about as though she were the mistress of all this wooden yarang. When she came back she asked:

"Dvorkin, aren't the women going to this Feast?"

"This is a Speaking Feast. Only men will be there," Vaamcho remarked impressively.

"That's all right, Wakat, there will be a separate women's feast afterwards. This is a gathering of the sea hunters only," Dvorkin put in.

"Are we Enmakai women bad hunters? Did you not see yourself?" Wakat said archly.

"You have become much too talkative!" Vaamcho said angrily, and swinging the motor onto his shoulder, he went down to the shore.

The whaleboat was being set afloat. Women, youths and children clustered round the boat, pushing and dragging it with difficulty. Omrytagen came running up, and the keel glided quickly and smoothly over the whalebone slips,

Tygrena stood watching the departing whaleboat from outside her yarang, thinking sadly, "The joy of life has come to them. They are growing cheerful. I shall leave Alitet. I won't go with him to the hills. Let Narginaut go. . . . But where shall I go? To the teacher? Tend the burners and scrape the wooden floor? Wakat won't let me. I guess she has got used to that school yarang. Who then shall I go to? Why does not Vaamcho want to take a second wife? He has food enough now. He has got himself two dog teams! He has become a motor man. A strong man he is now. But he doesn't want to. The new law doesn't allow a man to take a second wife. He is foolish, Vaamcho is."

Wakat ran out of the school in a screaming frock that shimmered in the sun. She ran down to the beach as though Tumatuge himself were there going out to the hunt. "She is getting used to cloth dresses. I suppose the teacher told her to wear such a dress. Does she think of becoming the wife of the Whiteface?"

The whaleboat rocked on the water. Omrytagen and Piliak sat on the cross bench and gazed in superstitious awe at Vaamcho, who was installing the motor. The water splashed in the engine socket, and the whaleboat seemed to have a hole in it. Vaamcho lifted the motor, lowered it into the hole and screwed it down tight. Then he took a tin of gasoline and began pouring it into the motor.

"Look, Piliak, look!" Omrytagen said in a low voice. "The motor is drinking!"

Vaamcho screwed down the stopper and with both hands rocked the head of the motor.

"H'm!" Omrytagen exclaimed in surprise. "Vaamcho has learned the magic of the Tang shamans. No wonder he has become a chief."

Vaamcho knew perfectly well what Piliak and Omry-

tagen were thinking about as he primed the motor. Feeling their gaze on him, he worked unhurriedly, dragging out every movement as he demonstrated his ability to handle this intricate thing.

He drew a thin belt around the head of the motor and, holding the end in his hand, shouted "Ready, Dvorkin!" to the teacher, who sat in the stern, at the tiller.

Then Vaamcho pulled the cord hard. The motor coughed, snorted, and the whaleboat quickly pulled out from the shore.

Piliak and Omrytagen clutched hands and stared in amazement now at Vaamcho, now at the motor. And the motor seemed to be singing a song. Maybe it was singing about the new life, about the new law? Oh, Omrytagen would have some news to tell people when he got back!

Meantime, in Rusakov's apartment a conference was being held. Anchow the chairman of the Tribal Soviet, Tevliankow the motorist, and Liok, the recently elected chairman of the hunting artel, were there. They all sat at the table talking about the trip to the Revcom. Rusakov repeated again the questions that would be discussed there.

"Anchow must g-g-g-go for certain. They will talk about the Tribal Soviets there."

Tevliankow agreed to take part in the talk about how best to hunt the sea beast.

Liok sat in silence, and his face did not betray his displeasure. Not every man can conceal what is going on in his heart. Liok was angry, very angry, but no one could see it.

"Well, c-c-c-comrades, so that is decided?" Rusakov asked in conclusion.

Only then did Liok speak up, and his voice was pained.

"No. It is not decided. And what about me? Or have you not heard, Rusakov, how Los invited me as a guest, here on this very spot? Eh? I don't seem to remember him

inviting Tevliankow. Have you forgotten? I remember. If they speak there about the hunting of the sea beast, how will they speak without me? Have I ceased to be a great hunter? Or do you think that Tevliankow knows hunting better than I do! Oh, no. He does not." And turning to Tevliankow he asked sternly, "Tevliankow, have you ever killed a whale?"

"No, Liok, I never killed a whale."

Liok looked triumphantly at Rusakov, waiting to see how the Russian merchant would extricate himself.

Rusakov, however, was silent, seemingly nonplussed.

"There, you see," Liok pursued, "and I have. And not only one whale. How many whale feasts have I not celebrated in my life! I shall go to this feast too. It can't be held without me. I am the chairman of the artel."

"I p-p-proposed this, Liok, because Tevliankow happens to be the motorist."

"Let Tevliankow go on the whaleboat, and I will go on my bidarka. Ah, but I have no motor man yet," Liok caught himself up with a groan. "That lad of mine has not learnt it yet."

"All right, Liok. I'll be your motorist," Rusakov agreed. "We'll put Tevliankow's motor on the bidarka, and the one we brought back from the hills we'll put on the whaleboat."

"When do we start?" Liok asked excitedly.

"We ought to wait for Vaamcho. We'll go together. And on the way we'll pick up other d-d-delegates."

"Come, Tevliankow, I will take your motor," Liok said in a tone that brooked no refusal. "Let it lie closer to my bidarka." And as he left the room he added gaily: "We will take our hunting tackle along. We may meet walruses. The spring run is not yet over."

CHAPTER SIX

Militiaman Khokhlov came home in a very depressed frame of mind. He decided that his militia days were over. Sabler had decamped, and Los would never forgive him that.

Sabler, by all signs, had gone away in a hurry. His dugout was littered with all kinds of rubbish and the stove contained the ashes of burnt documents. There was nothing of any value.

"Tanya, did you hear anything about the Russian who lived up the river? Did he go to the Revcom? Were there any rumours?" Khokhlov asked his wife.

"No. Here's a paper someone brought you." She handed him a letter in a closed envelope.

Khokhlov tore it open and read it anxiously. The letter ran:

"Comrade Khokhlov. During my trading among the nomads I ran into the dwelling of Nick the American. His yarang is at Hot Springs. I investigated it. By the looks of it he had gone out somewhere, but I couldn't wait for him owing to shortage of food for the dogs. In the passageway I found a motor, wrapped up in skins. To be on the safe side I took it with me. There are rumours that the American intends to hop off as soon as the river opens up. I advise you to keep a sharp lookout and show revolutionary vigilance. If there's a motor, there must be a whale-boat too.

"With Communist greetings,

"Rusakov.

"My wife, Anna Ivanovna, sends you her regards. She often recalls our trip out on the *Soviet* and is offended that you visit us so rarely. I am enclosing a note from geologist Dyagilev. It may prove useful."

Khokhlov opened the second note.

"Manager of the trading post Rusakov.

"Please give bearer, reindeer herder Kamerin, three packets of cartridges 30 by 30, one packet 30 by 40, four bricks of tea, one kilogram of tobacco (papusha), ten boxes of matches (preferably non-safety), four metres of bunting and goods to the value of eight rubles at his discretion.

"He's a splendid guide. Please give him good service. He has just brought me to Hot Springs.

"My best regards to your amiable wife.

"Sincerely yours,

"Geologist Dyagilev.

"P. S. I intend staying with Nick the American at Hot Springs three or four days. Here are the bearings, just in case: middle reaches of the Amguema River, about twenty kilometres below the waterfall, right bank along the Ichun tributary—about thirty-five kilometres.

May 19.

"V.D."

"Ah!" Khokhlov exclaimed upon perusing the letter. He thrust his hand into his thick mane and thought with a gnawing sense of anxiety. "What if they all get together at Nick's place and skedaddle off to America! You're done for, then, Khokhlov, my man."

The militiaman grunted, and there and then an idea leapt to his mind. Once they had a whaleboat, they would have to go down to the mouth of the Amguema! . . .

"Tanya! Go and tell the old man to get the bidarka ready. He'll take us down to the mouth of the river. We'll live there in a tent."

And so the militiaman Khokhlov shifted his base of operations to the estuary of the Amguema.

"There are eggs on a little island there," Khokhlov's old father-in-law said. "Goose eggs, many of them."

The name of that island in the estuary was Goose Island. During high water it was completely flooded, but as soon as the river dropped, high grass rapidly sprang up on it. The island was a safe place for the migratory birds: there were no foxes on it at all.

Leaving his son-in-law in the estuary, the old man set out for home on foot.

The militiaman pitched a tent, spread reindeer skins in it and went to sleep, having previously admonished Tanya to keep her eye on the river and wake him immediately she saw anything.

Khokhlov's plan was a simple one—to lie in wait for the fugitives on the bank with a rifle, make them lay to by firing warning shots, force them out onto the bank, make them strip to the skin, and drive them off a hundred or so yards into the tundra while he made a search; then occupy the stern at the rudder and make them row for dear life under the muzzle of his gun. In this way he would deliver them alive at the Revcom in ten days at the most.

Tanya was initiated into this plan. She sat on a little rise on the bank and kept a keen eye on the river.

The militiaman slept in the daytime and at night watched the river himself. The nights were light and differed from the days only in that they were cooler. Khokhlov made a trip to Goose Island and came back with the bidarka almost full of eggs. With a net attached to a long pole he caught fish—so many that he and Tanya could not clean them fast enough to hang them out on poles to be cured by the sun. When he grew tired of this work he would climb a rise overgrown with cloudberryes, stretch out on his stomach and nibble berries straight from the plants as he scanned the river. The one thing he feared was fog: in a fog he might miss the whaleboat. He and Tanya decided to cruise about on the river on foggy days and listen for voices. After all, they could not

sail without saying a word. Especially in a fog, when they would have to take counsel with one another.

For hundreds of kilometres in either direction the coast was deserted.

One day Tanya came running into the tent where her husband lay sleeping.

"Whaleboats!" she cried.

Khokhlov snatched his rifle and ran out.

A bidarka, and behind it two whaleboats, were coming down the coast. The air was rent by the noise of the engines, and the boats approached at a spanking speed.

Obviously they were not the fugitives. Khokhlov climbed to the top of the mound, fired a shot into the air and waved his cap.

Liok, however, had long espied the tent and shaped his course for it. How could he pass a human dwelling? All the more that people had to be given a chance to see how his bidarka ran.

Liok entered the estuary first. The bidarka slowed down against the current.

"What are you d-d-doing here, Khokhlov? Catching fish?" Rusakov asked, shaking hands with the militiaman.

"Yes, pike. I've figured out that Sabler and that Nick fellow should be coming down the river. Sabler has skipped out, and I guess Nick's is the only place he could make tracks for."

"Th-th-th-they'll be on a whaleboat and you on the bank? How d'you figure nabbing 'em?"

"What's a rifle for? Come to the worst, I'll shoot 'em and be done with it."

"All ashore for tea drinking!" bellowed one-eyed Liok.

Though the sun was shining hotly, Liok was dressed in a spruce marbled parka and handsome embroidered sealskin torbazes. His head was bared and the clean-shaven tonsure gleamed in the sun. His hair hung in a

lank fringe round his head, resembling a quaint head-gear. Liok was going to the Feast in excellent spirits.

"I'll go to the top of the hill and see if there are any walruses about," he said with an air of businesslike preoccupation, and stalked off down the beach.

"What a fine spot you've chosen, Khokhlov! Is that your summer bungalow?" Dvorkin asked, sitting down on the pebbled beach.

Khokhlov didn't answer. He said with envy:

"You're travelling like a regular flotilla. It makes a beautiful sight! I could do with a motor badly!"

"Order one. They'll deliver it n-n-next year," Rusakov said. "Let Los ask."

Vaamcho and Tevliankow refuelled their motors.

"Tevliankow!" Rusakov shouted. "Fill mine on the bidarka too!"

"Are you really going?" the militiaman asked sadly.

"We'll have a drink of tea and then start out," Dvorkin said. "We're in a hurry."

"Some friend you are! And we came out here together. Give me a chance to talk to people. I don't speak Russian for months at a time. Right now I'll put up some fish soup. Just look at the fish here! There's the net. Pull it out and you'll find fish in it. It's a fact."

Dvorkin showed interest. "Where's the net?"

"Where the peg is. See it?"

Dvorkin ran over to the water's edge and pulled out the net. Loaches a foot and a half long thrashed in it. Enthused, he started pulling the fish out and throwing them far up on the shore.

"Twenty-nine of them!" he called out.

"Take this pole and push the net under, and in half an hour you'll have just as many again," Khokhlov said.

Dvorkin was delighted. "What a life you lead, Khokhlov! Never say die!"

"I don't intend to. Pretty soon the salmon'll start

spawning. I've never seen it myself, but they say the whole estuary will be so jammed with fish you'll see nothing but their backs, from shore to shore."

Liok came back and sat down on the shingle.

"I didn't see any walruses, only a boat," he said calmly. "By the ice foot Three people in it."

"What? What?" Khokhlov yelled, seizing his rifle.

"Perhaps hunters?" Dvorkin asked.

"Oh, no," Liok said unhesitatingly. "Three hunters would not go out to sea. They are Tangs."

"Goodness!" Khokhlov ejaculated, his voice dropping to a whisper. "It's them. Give me your binoculars a minute, Rusakov." He ran towards the mound.

"Over there, almost off Spring Cove! Near the ice!" Liok shouted out after him.

Khokhlov looked through the glasses and saw a whaleboat. His hands began to tremble. He dropped on one knee, steadied his hands and clearly made out three figures.

"It's them!" he cried. "What an ass I am! They've given me the slip!"

"Let's have a look," Rusakov said, taking the binoculars.

The militiaman had not even noticed Rusakov and Dvorkin come up.

"Ouch, the swine! They've got me done on toast now, blast 'em!" the militiaman cried. "That'll do squinting at 'em. We've got to catch 'em quick!" he said to Rusakov.

"W-w-w-wait a minute! K-k-keep your shirt on! They won't get far with t-t-two oars. We'll catch up with them on the w-w-w-whaleboat. What's your p-p-plan?" Rusakov asked.

"We've got to get 'em alive. Can't do it on the whaleboat. Must use the bidarka. I saw the way it splits the breeze."



"W-w-w-well, let's go."

Liok was eating a sun-dried fish, holding it in both hands.

"Liok," said Rusakov. "Those people in the b-b-boat have deceived Lo-o-os. We must ca-a-a-atch them and bring them to the Revcom."

"We'll have a drink of tea and then catch them. They won't run away from us."

"They've got dogs and a sledge in the boat," the teacher said, looking through the binoculars.

"Has anyone got a pair of scissors?" Khokhlov asked anxiously.

"What d'you want them for?"

"I want a Chukchi haircut—like Liok's."

The old man stared at the militiaman in surprise, and said, between his sips of tea:

"If you want I can make your hair with a knife."

"Go ahead, Liok. Only do it quick."

"What's up?" the teacher asked.

"I've got a brainstorm," Khokhlov answered.

Liok sharpened his knife and swiftly shaved the crown, brushing the ends of the hair down over the forehead. In that haircut Khokhlov evoked a laugh even from Tanya. On second thought she was delighted that her husband now decidedly looked like a real man.

Khokhlov glanced at the tall figure of Omrytagen and said:

"Here, friend, let me have your parka."

Khokhlov arrayed himself in it and turned into a real Chukchi.

"D-d-damn good idea!" Rusakov said, guessing his plan.

The militiaman meanwhile was issuing orders:

"You, Dvorkin, will lie in the bottom of the bidarka. As soon as we come alongside the whaleboat, I'll go for the American and you jump out and lend me a hand. And

you, Rusakov, take my revolver—it's fully loaded. You'll jump out from the bottom of the bidarka too and point it at that Sabler bloke—he's a white-livered shrimp, he'll hold his hands up at once."

"It's a g-g-good plan. Come on, Liok!" Rusakov cried gaily.

"I'll go with you too," Vaamcho said.

"Tevliankow, you remain here. If you hear shooting, start the motor and join us," Rusakov said.

"Off we go hunting," Liok said with a smile.

The bidarka, its bow upreared, sped across the smooth sea towards the ice foot.

No one spoke in the bidarka. Liok sat in the stern, at the tiller. Rusakov lay at his feet, adjusting the motor from time to time. Khokhlov, bareheaded, sat at the side with his feet against Dvorkin's back. Vaamcho, Anchow and Piliak sat in the middle of the bidarka.

When the whaleboat became visible to the naked eye, Liok said:

"They have stopped rowing. Their whaleboat is not moving. One of the men is looking at us through a one-eye tube."

The bidarka swiftly gained upon the whaleboat. Khokhlov could now clearly make out the American. Sabler and his wife sat side by side holding the oars, while the American stood looking through a spyglass. Finally he sat down in the stern. Sabler and his wife shipped the oars. It was obvious that they had no suspicions. Sabler even waved his cap.

Liok manoeuvred his bidarka alongside the whaleboat and gave Rusakov a light kick in the stomach—the prearranged signal. Rusakov switched off the motor.

Khokhlov gripped the gunwale and the bidarka came to a stop. In the twinkling of an eye he threw himself upon Nick. Dvorkin leapt to his aid.

"H-h-hands up!" Rusakov shouted, levelling the revolver at Sabler.

Nick struggled furiously to wrench himself free, but Khokhlov and Dvorkin had him pinned down securely in the bottom of the boat.

Vaamcho and Anchow tied the arms of Sabler and his wife.

Khokhlov, breathing heavily, sat down on the green chest and glared at Sabler.

"Wanted to make a getaway, eh, blast you! Nearly had me done on toast!"

Sabler sat with bound arms and seemed perfectly calm.

"What's it all about?" he asked. "I was just going to the Revcom. What do you want of me? Mr. Nick was going to drop me on the way."

Mr. Nick lay near the stern surveying militiaman Khokhlov and his incongruous haircut. After a long silence he said arrogantly:

"You have no right to treat me like this! I'm a citizen of the United States of America. I'm in extraterritorial waters!"

"That's not so!" the militiaman cried. "We're just off our shore. Shut up if you don't want a bullet between the eyes!"

The bidarka took the whaleboat in tow. Liok sat in the stern while Vaamcho ran the motor.

"The white-faced people are at war," thought Liok.

Rusakov shouted to Liok to stop the bidarka and then said to Khokhlov:

"P-p-put that Sabler into the bidarka so they won't be able to t-t-talk to each other. Huh! Just off the Soviet sh-sh-shore, and he says 'extraterritorial w-w-waters!'"

While Sabler was being transferred to the bidarka Valentina Yurievna shook with terror.

Soon they arrived at the militiaman's tent, and all set out for the Revcom without a moment's delay. Liok's bidarka, containing Sabler, Rusakov and the militiaman, sailed in front; behind followed Tevliankow on the whaleboat with Sabler's wife and Tanya, and the captured whaleboat in tow in which Nick sat all by himself; Vaamcho's whaleboat with the teacher Dvorkin brought up the rear of this flotilla.

Khokhlov was elated. "Wanted to get away, the dogs! But I nabbed 'em after all!" he crowed.

CHAPTER SEVEN

At the Revcom all preparations for receiving the conference delegates were completed. Rows of long rough-hewn benches were set out in the spacious hall, and a table for the presidium covered with red bunting stood on a small dais. On the walls hung portraits of Lenin and Stalin and red streamers bearing slogans in large letters: "Long Live Our Soviet System!" and "Long Live the Friendship of the Peoples!"

Over the Revcom a big new flag fluttered in the breeze, as though inviting people into this new large house.

Ten whaleboats on which the conference delegates had arrived from the different settlements stood in a row keels upward on the beach. The hunters accommodated themselves in the yarangs, where they discussed various items of news. Never had there been such a gathering of people from all over the coast.

Los sat in his office perusing for the last time his report "The Tribal Soviets and the National Question." It was an amazing thing! Los suddenly realized that he was nervous. Everything seemed perfectly clear, yet he had a feeling that there was something missing in his report. Moreover, the fact that not a single delegate had

arrived from the nomad camps, and probably would not arrive, was a fly in the ointment.

Los brought out the minutes of the Tribal Soviets and ran over them once more. Something to which he had not previously attached any special significance now suddenly struck him as very important. It was the minutes of the Enmakai Tribal Soviet forbidding dead dogs to be thrown out in the settlement limits.

After that he called in Osipov and said:

"Have another look at your speech too. Make it shorter. There are some tedious passages in it. Throw out that part about the seal hunting. That's not the thing that counts. Walrus hunting is the main thing. Build up your speech on that. Especially the organizational side of it. Bring home the idea that the fur trapping depends upon that too. Don't you see—the more meat there is the more bait can be laid. Make a special point of the fact that we're planning to bring out ten more whaleboats. Motor whaleboats."

"I've got that worked up nicely, Nikita Sergeyevich."

"Fine. And where's Pyotr Petrovich?"

"He's with the teachers."

"I think he ought to say a word in the debate on the medical question, eh?"

"Certainly."

"No, I'd better speak on that question myself. By the way, don't forget to get up Yarak to take part in the debate—let him tell the folks the way fox skins should be treated. That's an important thing too. We must put the trappers up to efficient methods."

Los paced his office, mindful of the great responsibility that lay upon him in this new enterprise. Throughout his life he had always considered his particular job to be the most important. When he had worked as engine driver he thought the whole world rested only on the railway—if not the railway, mankind would go to the dogs. During

the Civil War the armoured train was, in his opinion, the decisive factor. The war could not be won without armoured trains. And now, too, he considered the activities of the Revcom the most important governmental work.

Los seemed to have grown younger. He was clean shaven, and a tuft of curly hair hung over the left side of his high forehead. He wore a military uniform which sat trimly on his figure. It was of his own tailoring, and it was his favourite costume, which he wore on all occasions. A wide army belt ran round his broadened girth. His top boots had been given a high polish and shone like the coat of a whale.

All of a sudden he caught sight of approaching whaleboats through the window.

"More delegates!" he exclaimed joyfully.

He went out with Osipov to meet the guests. The shingle crunched underfoot, and a light breeze wafted up the throb of the engines.

"Look, Osipov, look!" Los cried in astonishment. "It's a motor-driven bidarka. Why, chum, that's marvellous! It solves a whole problem!"

Osipov's face expanded in a smile. He gazed at the bidarka as though fascinated.

"You just look, it's outstripping the whaleboats! . . . How the deuce did they fix the motor on the skins? That's interesting!" Osipov exclaimed delightedly.

"But what's that? They've got another whaleboat in tow! Where from? And two motors? What the dickens—have they built a motor themselves?" Los said in a puzzled tone.

The settlement dwellers, the delegates, the teachers, the Revcom men and even Doctor Pyotr Petrovich came running down to the beach.

It was a most extraordinary spectacle. The bidarka, far ahead of the whaleboats, raced up to the shore and beached with almost half its hull resting on the sands.

Liok sat at the rudder in a dignified pose. He gazed with the look of a conqueror at the crowd that had flocked to the beach.

Hearty greetings were exchanged. Men shook and wrung each other's hands.

"What's the idea of this get-up?" Los said sternly when he noticed Khokhlov. "Acting the clown?"

Khokhlov shyly stroked the shining bald patch on his crown and the tufted fringe hanging down his head and said, pointing to Sabler sitting in the bidarka:

"It was part of my plan, Comrade Revcom Representative. That snake all but skipped off to America."

Los heard out Khokhlov's report attentively, then commanded:

"Take them into custody, all in separate rooms!"

Secing Liok, Los said cordially:

"Hello, Liok! You've come too?"

"Yes, I've come to pay you a visit."

"That's fine!"

Liok looked at Los quizzically and said in a low earnest voice:

"I thought many days about the conversation we had. Do you remember, when you came to Rusakov and paid a visit to my yarang?"

"Why, of course. We talked about American matches."

"Matches aren't the important thing," Liok said with a sigh. "I can make fire by rubbing two sticks together. But the motor— that is a thing! You cannot make it yourself. I thought a lot. A long time. Then at last I decided to join the artel. I, a great hunter, was left behind by ordinary hunters. Left behind the Enmakai women! The motor beat me. Oh, how it beat me! I did not want to remain a man to be made fun of, so I joined the artel. But now I have a motor too. Did you see how my bidarka runs?"

"It runs fine! And you've done the right thing, Liok, in joining the artel. You are a great hunter, you work

hard, not like Alitet who took the hunters' pelts from them for next to nothing. You are a toiler, Liok, and that is why you are a hunter of great experience. You know life well, and men should listen to you," Los said with emotion.

The old man's heart was warmed by a glowing sense of satisfaction that Los himself held such a high opinion of him. Nevertheless his natural pride reasserted itself when he said:

"Yes, I know life a little bit. You say men should listen to me?" he queried. "Yes, they should. I am now the chairman of the artel."

"You have been elected chairman?" Los asked in surprise.

"Yes, I told them to elect me."

Mr. Nick's green chest was brought into the Revcom.

"Well, Khokhlov, open it. Let's see what's inside. Have you looked?" Los asked.

"No, Comrade Revcom Representative, we didn't have the time," Khokhlov answered, pulling out of his pocket the key which he had taken away from Nick.

The lock snapped open and Khokhlov threw back the lid.

"Oho! Looks to me like gold," he said. "In this corner there are papers."

"Get them all out," Los said.

"Can't make head or tail of 'em, Comrade Revcom Representative. They aren't in Russian."

"Lay them out, never mind. They'll decipher them, those whose business it is."

"Maps. Ah! Here's a notebook with Russian writing."

"Let me see it." Los quickly turned over the pages.

"Here's another one."

"Why, it's Dyagilev's notebook!" Los exclaimed in astonishment.

Khokhlov and Rusakov exchanged glances. Los' face changed colour.

"Here's some more of 'em."

"How did they get in this chest?" Los asked anxiously.

"Where's my note?" Rusakov said, suddenly remembering.

Khokhlov brought out Dyagilev's note addressed to Rusakov and handed it to Los.

Los read the note. "Why, they've killed him!" he cried, clutching his head. "The bandits!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

The conference started early in the morning. Old Ilyich, Liok, Rusakov, Doctor Pyotr Petrovich and Vaamcho sat at the presidium table. Los sat next to Vaamcho. The seats in the hall were occupied by some fifty delegates and guests from the various settlements. They stared curiously at the walls decorated with red streamers. And though the delegates could not yet read what was written on them, the streamers gladdened them by their gay festive colouring. All the delegates sat in their fur parkas, though it was sufficiently warm indoors.

"Comrades!" Los said solemnly. "We have gathered at this conference for the first time. This meeting of ours is known throughout the Mainland. We have received congratulations and wishes of success from Petropavlovsk, from Khabarovsk and even from Moscow."

Los picked up some papers from the table, read them out and explained the radiograms received from the Gubernia Revcom, the Far Eastern Territorial Executive Committee and the Northern Peoples Aid Committee under the All-Russian Central Executive Committee.

"We have today received another radiogram from Vladivostok, from men whom you all know well—a message of greeting from Andrei and Aye."

Doctor Pyotr Petrovich and Rusakov began clapping. Liok and Ilyich looked at each other, and seeing Vaamcho doing the same thing, they too fell to clapping their hands. Then suddenly everybody began clapping, and all faces were wreathed in smiles of delight.

Nothing particular had happened—the hall was applauding, yet Los was radiant and deeply thrilled. He was to remember this as one of the happiest moments in his life. He saw the results of his work. These men sitting in the hall were the people whom he had been leading to the new life during more than a year's untiring effort. And he too began clapping loudly and smiling joyfully.

"Comrades," he said with deep agitation, beginning his report. "We shall now have a talk with you as to what the Soviet system is, what it is going to do for you, what the Tribal Soviets are and what they must do."

Los pointed to the portraits on the wall, and continued:

"Those two men—Lenin and Stalin—have fought for the Soviet system. They teach us that all the peoples in our country must live in friendship and respect one another. They, those two men, have made the new law. They made it in a long and hard struggle with wicked people. You know yourselves now that the new law is not so easily put into effect here as well. You and we are hindered in carrying out this law by men such as Alitet, as his father, the deceiver and shaman Korauge. They are afraid of this law, because it does not suit them. They rode about on the best dogs and they were never short of meat, while the people who hunted the walrus for them had to go to them and beg for a piece of meat. Such a law is a wrong law. The Soviet system has cast aside that law and made a new law of life, a just one...."

Los spoke slowly, endeavouring to bring home every word to the hearts of his listeners. For the first time in

this people's history men were dealing with the question of how to build a happy life.

And when Los had finished, Liok burst out in a loud voice:

"Hei, you people! I shall speak. Listen to what I say. . . . You have seen my bidarka, have you not?"

"We have seen it! We have!" voices cried in the hall.

"He who has not yet seen it, let him go to the beach. It is a good bidarka. A strong bidarka. Yet I was left behind by the artel whaleboats. I became ashamed. Many people know what a great hunter I am, yet I was left behind. And so I went to the new law of life. When Los came to us last winter I spoke a lot with him about it. I did not believe then. The spring came—I remembered him"—Liok pointed to Los—"and I believed. After all I still have one eye. Even the women, whom the motor drove, even they killed more walruses than I. And so I decided to become chairman."

Old Ilyich suddenly began clapping his hands.

Liok looked at Ilyich and asked quietly:

"Do I speak the truth?"

"The truth, it is the truth," Ilyich said.

Liok resumed his seat.

And everybody wanted to speak about the new life.

Vaamcho, Yarak, Osipov and other delegates took the floor. Much of what was said deviated from the point of Los' report, but everyone spoke about the new life.

"May I speak?" Omrytagen asked diffidently.

"Certainly. You absolutely should," Los answered.

"One of the hunters in our settlement lost his yarang. It burnt down. He only managed to save his clothes. Then the shaman said, 'The clothes must be given over to the fire, and everything else which the flames spared.' They burnt it all. Now the hunter sits naked in my yarang. The shaman sent him his own old clothes. The hunter thought, then said, 'I had better not. I shall have to trap

foxes two winters for these bad clothes.' And so he sits naked. What's to be done?" With this Omrytagen sat down.

Suddenly shouts were heard outside:

"Reu! Reu! Reu!"

The hall emptied in the twinkling of an eye. Liok ran ahead of everybody. A whale was out at sea. Rusakov rushed out too.

"Nikita Sergeyeovich! What d'you call this?" the doctor asked with a smile.

"Never mind, Pyotr Petrovich. Call it an adjournment," Los said

Meanwhile Liok was issuing orders on the beach.

"Let's have more bladders! Blow them up well!" he cried excitedly.

Lads sat around on the shingle blowing up seal bags through small holes. When their breath was out they stopped the holes with their tongues, and breathing in more air through their nose they blew it into the bags. The bags expanded and resembled real live seals with flippers but without heads

The whale shot up a glittering fountain of water over the smooth surface of the sea.

"Harpooners! To the bidarka!" Liok shouted "Rusakov! To the motor!"

"Let us not hurry, Liok," said Ilyich. 'Gaz-Oh-Leen is with us. He is a good spirit.'

The two old whalers divided the duties: Liok was to go ahead, and from his bidarka the most skilful harpooners would cast their harpoons into the whale; the boats would surround the whale, five on each side, and the men would fire dumdum bullets into its head; Ilyich would be in the leading boat.

"Eh! Steersmen! Come here!" Liok commanded in a stentorian voice.

The whale swam along slowly and calmly. After taking in air it dived into the depths head first, revealing its

back, as big as a hill and a glossy black, as though lacquered. It sank slowly, like an island during a flood, and then vanished with a flip of its tail. But it soon broke the surface in a different place: the head appeared, and again there shot up a mighty fountain that sparkled in the sun with the colours of the rainbow.

Liok gave instructions to the helmsmen, meanwhile keenly watching the movements of the whale.

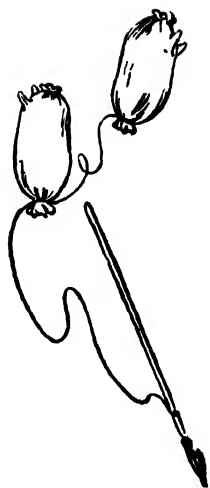
"Oh, this will be great hunting! This is not a seal which one can hold with one's left hand!"

Like a goose leader in the van of the flock, the bidarka skimmed swiftly over the unruffled surface of the sea. Behind it, with throbbing engines, followed the whaleboats, one after the other, in two groups of five each. Liok sat in the stern of the bidarka and looked back at the whaleboats in triumph. "Oh, there was never seen such a big hunt before!"

Eight experienced harpooners sat along the sides, four on each side of the bidarka. Each was eager to harpoon the whale first. At the whale feast, when girls would sing and dance to the beating of drums, the first harpooner would sit in a place of honour. The harpooners therefore kept a sharp lookout, holding their harpoons ready. At their feet lay inflated bladders, tied to the harpoons by thick walrus thongs

The bidarka got ahead of the whale. Liok swung the boat round sharply and steered towards the leviathan. At a motion of his hand the motor shut down. Everyone understood Liok at a single glance.

The whale lay calmly on the surface. It could not see the bidarka, which paddled noiselessly straight for its



head. A fountain of water showered down on the hunters and the head of the whale submerged instantly.

"Harpoon!" Liok yelled.

As the bidarka grazed the back of the whale, four hunters released their harpoons and four bladders came to rest on the water. The whale lashed the water with its tail. The sea was churned up and the bidarka was thrown high on the crest of a wave.

"Motor!" Liok cried.

Rusakov, his face growing pale, jerked the cord. The motor started throbbing and the bidarka swung round and hauled off.

The harpoons were imbedded in the whale's body, and the air bladders were drawn under.

"He's getting angry," Liok said. "Let him drag those four bladders about," he added, looking at the whaleboats.

After a while the bladders floated up, followed by a huge jet of water, and then the head of the whale reappeared. Ilyich raised his hand, and shots rang out from the boats.

The bidarka closed in again with the whale, head on. The motor was running, though Rusakov had long since lost any desire to come to close quarters with the whale. However, no power on earth could now stop Liok.

"Harpoon!" he cried piercingly.

Four more harpoons went home into the body of the whale. It now dragged eight air bladders after it. They flapped on the water like living seals.

Liok drew back, and again the whaleboats under the command of Ilyich gave chase.

The bidarka described a slow circle. One of the harpooners prepared a special bladder of spotted sealskin on a long thong.

Liok made two wide circles, watching the shooting and the air bladders.

"Let him get used to dragging eight bladders," Liok said to Rusakov.

Then he heaved round and raced at full speed towards Ilyich's whaleboat.

The motors throbbed loudly. Crowds of people stood watching the big whale hunt from the shore.

The bidarka overtook the whaleboat, the harpooners gripped the board, and Liok found himself side by side with Ilyich.

"Good hunting, Ilyich!" he cried gaily.

"Big hunting!" the latter answered.

Discontinuing the pursuit, the coupled boats cruised round in circles, keeping the quarry, however, in view.

"Let him drag the bladders," said Liok.

"Let him wear himself out," Ilyich added.

They crushed papusha into their pipes and lit up.

"Quick hunting," said Ilyich, puffing at his pipe.

"Very quick. Do you remember, Ilyich, how I chased a whale three days? Now we will finish quickly."

"We must call Los to the feast of the whale. If not for him I would not be seeing good hunting now. And now look—I have become young. Did you see how I guided the whaleboats?"

"The men shot well," Liok put in. "Without a miss. Straight into the right place."

The whaleboats spread out, and the chugging motors seemed to be telling each other what good hunting this was.

The wounded, exhausted whale dragged eight air bladders. It dived with them into the depths, but they pulled it up to the surface again.

Liok, after a smoke, pushed off from the whaleboat and returned to the pursuit.

"Harpoon!" he cried. He dropped the tiller and ran to the bow.

This time he himself paid out the long thong attached to the spotted bladder. The thong slipped through his hands. After letting out many yards of it, Liok gripped it tight, and the whale took the bidarka in tow. Rusakov switched off the motor.

"We're going for a ride on the whale!" Liok cried gaily.

All the harpooners smiled. All, that is, except Rusakov, who cast nervous glances at the whale.

Feeling that the whale was taking a plunge, Liok swiftly threw out the spotted bladder.

"Motor!" he shouted to Rusakov.

The motor snorted and the new helmsman steered the bidarka after the spotted bladder. Liok, bending over the prow, reached out for the bladder. He seized it and began taking in some more of the thong, so that the whale should not sink the boat when it jerked it. The whale, however, was now swimming on the surface and hauling the bidarka along with it.

Liok held the thong in his hands like reins, as though he were driving reindeer. The whale would make a dash one minute for the open sea, then swim down the shore, then turn again, while Liok kept a firm grip on the thong and the bidarka raced through the water in the wake of the beast. At last the whale turned sharply and made for the shoals.

"Go on, go on!" Liok shouted, his face radiant.

The whale threw itself out onto the shoals not far from the village and lay still. Half its gigantic carcass was on the shingle. Crowds of people surrounded it. The Revcom men had run up to the shore as well. The whaleboats came up, and the hunters immediately got busy dressing the carcass.

"Well, Rusakov, I congratulate you on the excellent catch," Los said. "Tell me all about it."



"L-l-later. I haven't recovered yet. My heart's still in my 'b-b-boots."

"Really?" Los grinned. "Was it so frightening?"

"Whoever heard of s-s-sailing right onto a whale's back! I thought the bidarka would fly into splinters. A whale's no j-j-joke. Whale g-g-guns are n-n-needed!"

The carcass was dressed quickly. Dozens of men armed with sharp knives crawled over the whale's head like flies. Soon the lower jaws of the beast were laid bare. Two teeth jutted up like poles. Several men stood on the animal's huge tongue.

"There will be a big feast!" Liok said, turning to Los.

"First we'll finish our meeting and then we'll arrange a feast."

Liok caught sight of radio operator Molodtsov with a camera.

"No, no!" he cried out. "Take it away!"

"Why take it away?" Molodtsov said. "What's the matter?"

"You must not," Liok said firmly.

Molodtsov waved his hand and got ready to take a picture.

Liok ran up to him, seized the tripod and pushed it aside. "You must not!" he said sternly.

"Nikita Sergeyevich!" Molodtsov called. "He won't let me take a picture."

"Why not, Liok?" Los asked.

"Once I killed a whale and some Mericans did this. Then I did not see a whale for three years. He must not!"

"Oh, that's another story," Los concurred. "Ilya, take your camera away."

"What nonsense, Nikita Sergeyevich," Molodtsov muttered, setting up the camera again.

"No, it's not nonsense. Take your camera away!" Los said angrily.

CHAPTER NINE

The conference lasted three days. It really was a Feast of the Big Speaking. Never had this coast witnessed such a numerous gathering of people. One man spoke and everybody else listened. Then a second man spoke and a third, and again all the others listened. Even Omrytagen, who never commanded an audience of more than three, now spoke to everybody. "Oho! They're listening to me too!" he thought with pride.

Men spoke about the Tribal Soviets, about trading, about the Russian doctor and the school, about sea hunting and little whaling cannon which could shoot a harpoon from a distance like a rifle. Men spoke about Liok's motor-driven bidarka, about life and how best to arrange it. Everyone spoke of what he considered most important.

Vaamcho gave a long account of his life and his relations with Alitet. He told everybody how Alitet had poured kerosene over his fox bait, and how the shaman had deceived him by making him burn his chairman paper over a bonfire. He spoke of these things with indignation, self-confidently and decisively.

And men were amazed. "Ai, how brave Vaamcho has become!"

After the session Los called Vaamcho into his office and shook his hand warmly.

"Fine, Vaamcho! You spoke well. That is the way to fight for the new life. Such men who fight for the truth and a just life are called Communists. Do you want to join the Communists' artel?"

Vaamcho pondered this.

"Los," he said after a lengthy pause. "I shall do as you tell me. I have long seen the truth of life from a distance. Now I see it near. And I shall not turn off the path now. I have a constant friend—Dvorkin."

"I want to make you representative of the Revcom for all the settlements in the northern part of the district. You will sometimes go out to visit the Tribal Soviets and tell people how things should be done. The teacher Dvorkin will help you. Do you understand, Vaamcho?"

"Very good, Los. I agree. Now I can travel. Alitet's good dog team has passed over to me."

Meeting Liok that evening, Vaamcho showed him his Party card. They sat down on the bottom of the whaleboat and Liok closely scrutinized the little red book. Vaamcho told him that Los was a Communist and that he, Vaamcho, was a Communist too.

"What is it—'communist'?" Liok asked, unable to tear his eyes away from the little red book.

"It's a man who wishes to remake life."

"Remake life?" Liok queried sceptically.

"Yes," Vaamcho answered firmly.

"Have you become a Whiteface to attempt such a task? Have you many goods, rifles and cartridges? Have you many whaleboats, many motors? Los has all that. Did you see how Rusakov obeys him? Let him remake life himself. By all means. Only we must not hinder him."

"True, Liok, I have no goods. I am not a trading man. But I shall help Los to remake life. You know yourself what a long coast it is."

"Help him? . . . Can't I help him too? I'm chairman," Liok said sternly. He took Vaamcho's Party card from him. "You wait here. I will soon be back."

Liok sought out Los, and beckoning him with his finger, drew him off towards the shore of the lagoon. Los followed him.

"Where are you taking me, Liok?"

"Come, come. I have some news."

When they reached the lagoon Liok lifted up his eye and said:

"I guess you are a right man. You praised my bidarka at the meeting. You are an understanding man. To remake life you have ordered the trading men to bring motors for the bidarkas as well. Let those bidarka men who receive motors come to me. I shall tell them how to tie the motor to the bidarka. So be it. I guess I shall help you to remake life. The remaking actually has started."

Los, his hands behind his back, stood listening attentively to the old man. He was glad to see these signs of awakening interest on the part of Liok. Meanwhile the old man pursued:

"You think I still do not see the change that has taken place in life? . . . I see it. There it is, my eye. It sees well. It sees everything. And my hand?" Liok showed his broad palm. "It is a strong hand! It knows a lot, this hand. With this hand I made the bidarka. It can make a whaleboat too, if there will be boards. Vaamcho cannot make a whaleboat, but I can. I can make it in a single winter. I cannot make a motor, but I can make a whaleboat." And Liok added quietly, "Because the motor is made of iron."

"I'm very glad, Liok, that you and I shall remake life together. I am very glad that you have become the chairman of the artel. It is all very good. So you have made up your mind definitely to go to the new law?"

"Yes," Liok said, drawing a deep breath. He unclenched his hand, revealing Vaamcho's Party card. "Why didn't you give me one like this?" he said. "You gave Vaamcho one but not me."

"Where did you get that card, Liok?" Los asked in surprise.

"I took it from Vaamcho. To show it to you."

"All right, Liok. I think that in time you can be given a card like that too. Do you want one?"

"Of course I do!"

"Do you know what kind of card that is, Comrade Liok? Sit down and I'll tell you."

They sat down on the shingle, filled up with papusha from Liok's pouch and Los, puffing at his pipe, told him what a man with such a card should be.

After the Party meeting Liok received his membership card. Before going he said:

"Tomorrow we shall hold a whale feast and I'll go home. I shall clear the way for the right life."

Liok wandered along the beach all evening by himself. He was thinking about life, holding the Party card in his hand. He had nowhere to put it. There was not a single pocket in his clothes. Then he pulled out his tobacco pouch, put the card in with the papusha, thrust it back under his belt and strolled far out of the village.

Tomorrow morning the whale feast would begin. Liok would sit in the highest place of honour. Next to him would sit old Ilyich, and on the other side of him Knoi the harpooner, and Los. And where would Rusakov sit? Probably next to Ilyich. After all, he drove the motor of the bidarka very skilfully. The girls would sing and dance. There would be the dance of the whale. Liok himself would dance it. Who better than he could show how the whale swam, how it lashed its tail? No one. Only Liok could. And then the men would stow their boats full with whale meat and depart to their settlements. Men everywhere would say, "It was Liok who killed the whale. Liok is a great hunter!"

And so he wandered by the seashore, meditating on the forthcoming whale feast.

Coming across a boulder, Liok sat down on it and brought out his tobacco pouch. Before lighting up he had another good look at the little red book.

"H'm! Look at the way Liok has got stuck to this paper!" he said in a surprised tone, admiring his photograph.

He gazed at his photograph a long time and recalled Molodtsov, who had made it. That youth had wanted to

photograph the whale. He did not understand yet that you must not photograph a whale. Because a whale, after all, was not a man. A whale cannot understand what a man understands. Los knew that very well. He agreed with Liok that the whale must not be photographed. Ho! He was an understanding man, that Los.

Liok held the little red book at arm's length and examined his photograph again. "It's done right—with one eye," he said appreciatively of the radio operator's handiwork.

CHAPTER TEN

As soon as the conference was over Yarak left urgently for Loren. He had to hurry with the packing of the furs, as the steamer was already on the way. This news about the steamer was reported by the radioman Molodtsov, who with the aid of a motor and wires stretched up on the roof knew everything that was going on in the wide world. A wonderful man, that Molodtsov! Even Los asked him for news. A man, of course, couldn't live without news.

The snow had already melted, and the sledge glided over the wet tundra. The dogs made slow progress.

Yarak shouted at them, the while he thought about the white men. He considered himself an expert on white men and a linguist besides, for he could speak not only Chukchi but American and Russian as well. Still and all he couldn't understand why the Russians and the Americans were so unlike. Their actions and their customs were different, and the Russians did not treat the people the way the Americans did. Even though they were white they were altogether different.

Yarak recalled his whole life—how, as a child outcast the bearer of the evil spirit, he had been taken in by Charlie Red Nose; how Charlie had hired him out for the

whole summer to the master of an American whaling steamer in exchange for ten cases of cartridges. In those days there was nothing surprising in the fact that Yarak had worked on the whaler and Charlie Red Nose had taken the cartridges. Only now had it become clear that Charlie was a wrong man. And the captains of the whalers? How many men they used to take from the coast for their whaling expeditions! And women and girls too! The Americans liked to have a good time with women while they were out whaling. They simply took them along, although it wouldn't have hurt, of course, to ask their husbands and fathers.

Yes, nobody knew the life and customs of the white-faced people as well as Yarak. The Americans were smart at giving orders. They waved their arms about from one side to another and yelled at the hunters like a team driver at his dogs.

The men on the coast got nothing but their food for flensing the whales, and even that they provided themselves. "This is life!" the men thought. On deck they could eat as much whale meat as they wished. There was so much of it that it had to be thrown overboard anyway. The Americans had no special liking for the smell of whale flesh and blubber; they preferred to eat food from iron cans. From the carcass they took only the whale-bone, and besides they searched in the stomach for ambergris. And when they found some, not only the captain celebrated but everybody did. Yes, Yarak had felt he knew their life well. And only now did it strike him that he didn't know the Americans at all.

With a smile Yarak recalled how Charlie Red Nose had dragged him away from Mary by the leg. And he had walked obediently out of the iron house. That was life. The customs of the white man had to be obeyed. With the white man there could be no joking. Charlie owned goods; captain friends visited him. Charlie never trav-

elled along the coast—everybody came to him. And he talked only about polar foxes.

The Russians said at the Feast of the Big Speaking that all men were equal—the Eskimos, the Chukchi and the Russians. All men, white and black and yellow. That was probably right. "H'm. . . . It isn't easy to understand the new customs right away. You just try to figure it out right away! Now Zhohov is a Russian too, but he's like an American—he talks in a shout."



Remembering Los' confidential news that a new, right man was coming out to take Zhohov's place, Yarak was filled with a sense of pride that he was the only man who knew this secret. Zhohov, of course, didn't want to leave here, but he would have to go. Los said so.

All the way Yarak reflected on the white men.

The yarangs of the Loren settlement came into sight on the hillside. Yarak shouted at the dogs and rode up to the trading-post house. He was met by Zhohov.

"Well, delegate, how are things?" he asked ironically. "Come in, tell me all about it."

They went into his room and Zhohov set a bottle of vodka on the table.

"I'll have to treat you to firewater. After all, we're trading comrades, you and I."

Yarak was surprised at Zhohov's kindness. Great though the temptation was, he said, scratching his head: "Better not. . . . Mary will be angry. I'll have to tell her the news too."

"You'll tell her," Zhohov said, filling two glasses.

Yarak eyed the glass with a sigh, then pulled out his little red book and said:

"I've joined the Communists' artel. There it is."

"Communists?" Zhohov asked in surprise. "Here, let's have a look."

"No. You look at it from there."

"Don't be a fool! Let me see it," Zhohov said sternly, holding out his hand.

"No. You mustn't look at it," and Yarak put his membership card away.

Zhohov drained his glass, then looked up at Yarak and said derisively:

"What the hell kind of a Communist are you? They're just making a fool of you. What do you know about it?"

"I don't understand much about it yet, it's true, but Los said I would get to know about it all later on."

Zhohov fished about in a glass jar of pickles with his fork.

"Zhohov," Yarak said, "I know some news. A steamer will soon come. We must get the furs packed into the bags quickly."

"H'm! . . . Communist!" Zhohov said, shaking his head. "Well, what was all the talk about there?"

"I'll go home. I must have a look at my son and then hurry to get the furs packed."

Yarak went into his room. Bending over the little cot of his sleeping son, he smiled and touched Andrei's cheek with his finger. The child opened its eyes.

"You lie in a bed like Charlie. What round eyes you have! Goo-goo!" said Yarak.

The child blew out its cheeks and started crying.

"Crying? What are you crying for? You just look." Yarak pulled out his Party card and waved the little red book before Andrei's nose. "Do you see the book we have? Do you know what book this is? Oh, it's such a book! You mustn't cry with such a book."

Yarak caught a glimpse through the window of Mary in a white smock and a red cross on her kerchief hastening home. Rultyna followed slowly behind her.

Yarak hid in the wardrobe and pulled the door to.

Mary came into the room and ran up to her son. She took him in her arms, and lifting him high in the air she asked:

"And where is father?"

Rultyna came in and said in a surprised tone:

"The dogs are lying at the door, but Yarak is not to be seen. Where is he?"

The door of the wardrobe opened and Yarak stepped out into the middle of the room smiling broadly.

They all burst out laughing.

When they sat down to the table, Yarak told them the news about the Big Speaking Feast.

"A steamer will soon come. I must hurry and pack the furs away in bags."

"What a rich man Los is! How much fur he has!" Rultyna said.

"I am not sure whose fur it is," Yarak said thoughtfully. "It is not so easy to understand. At the Feast of the Big Speaking, people said that the fur belonged to State."

"Who is State? A white man?" Rultyna asked.

"No. State is the people. You, I, Mary, the doctor, the teacher, Los—everybody. Many, many people! That's

whose fur it is. To tell you the truth, it's not easy to understand. Anyway, it isn't only Los' fur."

Rultyna and Mary gaped at Yarak.

He took Rultyna to the warehouse with him, called over two lads and began packing the polar and red fox skins in sacks, fifty skins in each sack. Zhohov locked the sacks with iron seals.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It was a lovely sunny day. The limpid blue sky was mirrored in the smooth sea. No steamer was yet visible on the horizon, but the entire population of the Loren settlement was in that pleasant state of thrilled excitement which always seizes the dwellers of the North when a wisp of smoke is descried far out at sea. The children yelled in a frenzy of delight:

"Steamer, steamer!"

The steamer anchored in the roadstead, and the crowd rushed pellmell for the motor whaleboat with cries and merry whoops. Simultaneously a cutter put off from the steamer. The air was rent with the noise of the motor and the cutter sped toward the shore. The launching of the whaleboat was held up. Suddenly Aye's voice was heard from the cutter yelling delightedly!"

"Yara-a-ak! . . . It's me! . . . I've come back!"

He stood at the wheel, and with head proudly raised he steered the vessel for the shoals, though none of the people standing on the shore imagined for a moment that it was Aye piloting the craft. Who, indeed, could imagine it!

The cutter slackened speed and grounded on the sand-bank. Aye rushed to the bow, and swinging his arms, leapt ashore.

"Kakomei, Aye!" everybody cried.

Aye stood speechless with joy.

He only smiled and threw glances at his high rubber boots.

Los' wife, Natalia Semyonovna, had arrived together with Andrei Zhukov.

"My word!" the doctor cried delightedly. "Won't Los be glad!"

Zhukov presented the new arrivals:

"This is Comrade Bodunov—building superintendent of the cultural service base. We're going to build twelve big houses!" he cried joyously. "And this is the new manager of the fur-trading post, Comrade Smelov...."

There was handshaking and noisy greetings.

Meanwhile Aye had recovered his power of speech. He slapped Yarak on the back and said laughingly:

"Do you see, Yarak, I didn't get lost on the Mainland. Do you remember how we talked about it in the tundra?"

"I told you it would be all right, didn't I?"

Aye tugged Yarak by his jacket, and flaunting new words, he said:

"Your suit is as good as any bosun's in Vladivostok. Well, how is life, Yarak?"

"I am living in that house. Working as fur man. I live together with Mary. We have a son."

"No! A son? That's fine!" Aye cried in delight. "And I have been travelling a lot. We rushed about like the wind, Andrei and I. We travelled to the warm sea. Then we came back to Vladivostok and I learned how to pilot this cutter. I'm a captain now!" Aye said importantly.

"And this is my friend Smelov," he added, pointing to a tall man with a grave, thoughtful face.

Aye pulled him by the sleeve of his leather coat, thus demonstrating on what friendly terms they stood, and said:

"Look, Smelov, this is my friend Yarak. He is working as fur man in the trading post."

"Ah, Yarak! Glad to make your acquaintance," Smelov said with a friendly smile.

"Is Zhohov going?" Yarak asked with a sly smile.

"Yes, he's going. We'll work together now."

"Very good. Are you a Communist?" Yarak asked.

Smelov was rather taken aback by the unexpected question of this young lad with the black vivacious eyes. It was such an odd question to hear in these wilds.

"Yes, I ni a Communist," he answered.

"So am I! Here's my little book!" Yarak said proudly.

Aye said enviously:

"I haven't got a book like that. But then I'm a captain. Yarak, would you like me to take you for a ride on the cutter? Let the other men come too! Eh?" he suddenly proposed to his old friend.

They went up to the cutter, and Aye loudly invited everybody to take a ride out to the steamer.

The men looked at one another in indecision.

"Climb in, climb in!" Aye cried, "Everybody climb in!"

The youngsters poured in first. Then, glancing doubtfully at Aye, the hunters followed suit.

"Misha, start her up!" Aye called through the window of the little hut built on the deck of the cutter.

Aye took the wheel and with a triumphant expression on his face spun the cutter about at full speed and headed for the steamer.

"Kakomei, Aye! Captain Aye!" the men shouted rapturously, marvelling at his ability to run such a big iron boat.

When the cutter reached the steamer Aye expertly jerked the handle. There was a tingling sound inside the little hut and the cutter backed up and came to a stop.

"Well," Aye said to the men, "now go visit the steamer."

And although it was considered a great happiness to go aboard a ship, nobody moved. Nobody wanted to go

away; they all gazed with curiosity at the cutter which Aye piloted.

Aye was gratified to see that his tribesmen did not leave the cutter. Indeed, the reason he had driven them out to the ship was to demonstrate his great skill.

He jerked the handle, again something tingled, and the motor started. He circled around the ship on the cutter. Then he turned back to the shore.

"Aye, will they start unloading the goods soon?" Yarak asked.

"We brought twelve houses and ten whaleboats. Another ship will bring goods."

Aye talked and handled the wheel as calmly as though he were driving dogs which knew just where to take their master.

And everybody was amazed. Aye knew everything! He even knew what the steamer was carrying. That was Aye for you—a herdsman without a wife! It was all most amazing!

Andrei stood on the shore and smiled as he gazed at the approaching cutter with its numerous passengers. He realized that Aye was showing off his ability to run the cutter to his tribesmen.

"Aye, you will have to make a trip now," Andrei said when the cutter landed. "You'll have to take Natalia Semyonovna to Revcom headquarters. She wants to get there today."

"I'm ready!" Aye cried enthusiastically.

To ride along the coast and pilot the cutter himself—that was news everybody would talk about!

"We'll soon weigh anchor, Aye, and sail to Lavrenti Bay. You come to the bay on the cutter. Only don't delay. On the way there pick up as many men as you can in the settlements to speed up the unloading of the steamer. Is that clear?" Andrei asked with a smile.



"The mission is clear, Comrade Zhukov," Aye replied in Russian, winking gaily.

Aye would have driven with pleasure not only to Revcom headquarters but to Enmakai itself. Wouldn't Tygrena be surprised! At the thought of her he heaved a painful sigh.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The cultural service base construction was commenced on a pebbly spit of land covered with a growth of perennial grass in which the wild ducks nested.

The timber freighter had discharged its cargo and gone. The building gang remained to winter, the men accommodating themselves in tents and under overturned whaleboats. The first buildings that had to be erected were the boarding school and a hospital for twenty beds.

A bathhouse made its appearance entirely out of schedule. Drenched under the autumn rains, the builders used the bathhouse to warm and steam and dry themselves in, after which they went to their tents and crawled into their fur sleeping bags.

Very soon the foundations of two large buildings took shape on the spit.

All kinds of rumours spread up and down the coast and far into the tundra. The shamans said that the Russians would take away the children, lock them up in the cages of the big houses and then send them away to a strange land in ships.

The nearby reindeer breeders abandoned their age-old pasturages and migrated into the heart of the tundra. In the tundra men said that the herdsman Aye had become a machine man, had lost his reason and had ceased to be a real hunter.

But Aye rose immensely in the estimation of the sea hunters of the coast settlements. He made frequent trips

along the coast enlisting men for the construction job. Not even Los ever imagined that the cutter piloted by Aye would cause such a sensation and prove to be such a potent agitator in favour of the new life.

The walrus hunting season being over, men willingly went to work on the construction job, where, according to absolutely authentic rumours, people were paid in ruble papers. Strange as it may seem, all the trading posts accepted these papers as though they were fox skins and gave you in exchange a great variety of goods, including sugar and tobacco and even rifles. These ruble papers penetrated everywhere. They were stronger than fox skins. And so men came on foot and travelled down on sledges to work on the construction job. Oh, this was quite different from working on an American whaler for one's food only!

Winter set in. On the eve of the anniversary of the October Revolution the builders moved into the new schoolhouse which already was roofed.

Aye dashed off by sledge to the coast settlements to invite people to the big feast.

He would sit drinking tea in a crowded yarang, telling people:

"This feast has been arranged by Lenin. I saw myself on the Mainland how all people joyously celebrated it. They walked carrying red cloth flags. There were so many of them that they were more numerous than the birds that flock together on the cliffs. That's how many people there were! Joy was in their faces, as though they were seeing the sun after a long winter. Another big man—Stalin, Lenin's comrade—gave orders for a similar new life to be made here. You see yourselves now—the whaleboats have come with motors. And you see yourselves how handy they are to hunt on. Now we too are going to have the Russian feast!" Aye reflected a while, then solemnly said, "It is our Feast of the Right Life."

Aye sat in a jacket under which was revealed an expanse of bright shirt. His thick black hair was cut short in the Russian fashion and stood on end. He related how people had regaled him there on the Mainland and how all the Russians were eager to do something good for him.

Amid general silence he spoke at great length about the wonderful things he had seen on the Mainland, about houses as huge as cliffs, about big lights in the settlements, about iron sledges that rush with a noise of thunder and twice as fast as dog teams along iron-made roads.

The hunters, the women and the children sat listening in sceptical silence. This was not the Aye they had known before. Had not this Aye lost his senses when he became a machine man? Who knows what happened to the other Aye, the reindeer herdsman and the wifeless man? But then he had always been a good teller of tales.

Next to the burner lay an old man. He was holding a pipe which had gone out. The old man listened attentively to what Aye was saying.

And when Aye had finished his story the old man sat up and said:

"People, look at him. He has lost all human likeness. His hair has ceased to be such as all our men wear. It does not hang over his forehead, but sticks up in the air. Can one be a real hunter with such hair? His face has gone half white. He is one of us only by half. Yet there were once rumours that Aye trapped even silver foxes. There were rumours that he was a good shot. I guess he would now miss a seal at close quarters. It is improper for us to listen to him. His body is not clothed in a reindeer skin, it is wrapped in Tang clothes. Such a man may bring evil upon us!" the old man concluded with a tremor in his voice.

Aye listened to the old man in agitation. The hunters glanced at one another.

"Old man," Aye said with deliberate calm, "because my hair lies in a different way I have not forgotten how to shoot."

"Men, place him out a long target! Let him shoot off the tip of a reindeer antler. Then we shall see whether he is one of us or not!" the old man said.

The hunters quickly crawled out of the polog. A lad ran up to the old man with a pair of branching antlers.

The old man examined them carefully, and drawing out his knife in a leisurely manner he made an incision on the very tip of a small branch.

"Let him shoot here," the old man indicated.

"Very good," Aye said.

He was given a Winchester, and the same young lad placed the antlers in the snow.

"Farther back, put it farther back! I can still see the tip well!" Aye cried.

The hunters looked at one another in surprise. "Was he out of his senses? At such a distance it was even difficult to hit a seal's eye!"

The hunters grew sorry for Aye. Even the old man thought that Aye deserved to be pitied. Aye, however, Winchester in hand, sat down calmly in the snow and asked:

"Is this an old rifle?"

"It was traded last winter," the old man answered.

"It's hard to shoot from a strange rifle," Aye said, taking aim.

He placed his elbows on his raised knees and took long and deliberate aim. Then he suddenly brought the barrel close to his eyes and carefully examined the sight.

"It's a good sight," the owner of the Winchester assured him. "I took off the American sight and made one myself. The rifle is well sighted."

Aye took aim again. He took a long time over it. People watched him tensely, and Aye himself felt nervous.

He took the rifle off his knees and looked at the sight again. This was no easy matter! At last he fired.

Men ran up to the antlers.

"A miss!" they cried.

Aye sat on the snow and scratched his head.

"You have missed, Aye. The old man was right," said an elderly hunter.

Aye sprang to his feet and said in a huff:

"This rifle is yours. You are its owner. Try and shoot the tip off yourself."

The owner of the rifle sat down, took aim, fired and also shot wide.

The old man who had devised this test for Aye said gravely:

"Aye has probably learned from the white men how to boast. Place the antlers where I bade you."

The antlers were brought nearer.

Aye took aim again. A shot rang out, and once more the crowd rushed to the target. Aye was left alone with the old man.

"A hit! A hit!" the hunters cried joyfully.

Aye jumped up and drew a breath of relief.

The antlers were brought up to the old man. He felt the bullet-scarred end of the horn and said:

"Now I see that you have remained a real man of our land. I guess we ought to see what this feast is the Russians are making."

"It is a good feast," Aye said. "There will be racing on dogs, rifle and running contests and wrestling bouts. Prizes will be given out for everything. Get your dogs ready. The best team driver will receive a rifle!"

"Ho! Are you not lying?" the old man asked incredulously.

"No, I am not lying. Come and see for yourself."

And everyone began making preparations for the Feast of the Right Life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A most extraordinary custom arose in the settlement of Enmakai. The women took up the pursuit of trapping. Now, I ask you, is it a woman's business to ride about the tundra on dog teams, to scatter bait for the animals, set traps and daily examine them? Yet all this the teacher Dvorkin had started.

The people of the settlement had faith in him. The joy of life had come to dwell in their yarangs. It had come to stay.

The women themselves, when they first heard from the teacher that they should start trapping polar foxes, laughed at him.

"You just start it. Later on we shall breed good dogs. Each one will have a good dog team," the teacher urged them.

Not to hurt the teacher's feelings, for they had all learned to love him, the women decided to try their hand at trapping.

The gathering broke up late that night. The sound of the women's laughter was borne to him from outside, and the teacher smiled.

And all along the coast the Russians persistently helped the poor folk. It was they, with their self-moving whaleboats and new law of life, who had driven hunger from the coast.

"Oh, this is only the beginning!" the teacher said.

There was plenty of meat available, and each woman could take fox bait out into the tundra without detriment to the household.

And what rejoicing there was when Wakat brought home the first polar fox, for which one could receive forty ruble papers!

The women, too, had learned to understand a thing or two about these ruble papers. To mark this memorable event—the first fox trapped by a woman—Vaamcho called a meeting.

The culprit of the occasion, Wakat, was the centre of attention. Her name was on everyone's lips. After the meeting she did not sleep a wink all night, and early in the morning, before the moon had risen, she sped off to examine the traps.

So that was it, the new law! Not a bad law at all. Anyone who had eyes could see it.

With his good dog team Vaamcho found time to scatter fox bait in the tundra and visit the neighbouring settlements, spreading the great words of truth.

Alitet alone found no joy or comfort. Life in the Enmakai settlement wearied him. He had long lost the habit of the hunter's life and did not know now what to do with himself. He slept in the daytime in order not to speak with people, and in the night he prowled about the settlement or the pack ice on the sea like a wild animal. When anyone from the Revcom came to the settlement and everybody ran to the school to hear the news, Alitet retired to the cliffs and did not come back until the Russian had gone. The joy of life had departed. Alitet was no longer friends with luck. His heart hungered for trade. Idleness oppressed him. It only engendered gloomy thoughts. Brown had deceived him that summer too. There was not a place along the coast where he could get goods. Everywhere sat Russian merchants of Los' tribe. Life grew hard for Alitet. His family moved from their three pologs into one, because there was not enough blubber to heat and light all the apartments. Even in this sole polog the flame burnt feebly.

Alitet lay silent in the semigloom with open eyes. No one knew what he was thinking. Everyone felt depressed and maintained a dreary silence.

Tygreña expected that soon, very soon now, Alitet would quit the coast and go away for good into the hills.

Embittered, he lay scowling at his father Korauge. Alitet had conceived a hatred for him too. Ill-will and rancour had come to dwell in the polog.

"How long can you lie thus? You might think of getting some blubber," Korauge reminded his son.

Alitet sat up on the reindeer skin and stared hard at his father. Then he said gruffly:

"Do you not see that hard times have come? You might think of taking your departure to the dwellers of the Upper World. You have long ceased to be of any use. Or do you still think that you are helping me in my affairs?"

The old shaman winced and said in a deeply pained voice:

"Whoever heard of anyone telling a man to go to the dwellers of the Upper World? Has my tongue ceased to move in my mouth to request death myself? Have I ceased to be the master of my own life? Or do you think that I shall not be able to utter the last word?"

Alitet jumped up. "And do you not see," he said in an overloud, disrespectful tone, "how the new law which the Russians have brought surrounds us on all sides?"

In a fit of fury Alitet tore the sooty wooden and bone fetishes from the walls and hurried out of the polog. He seized an axe and began smashing them into small pieces, fuming with rage and muttering with each stroke of the axe:

"There, take that, you helpers in life!"

He collected the remnants of the idols in his hand, went outside and flung them into the snow. He stamped

upon them, then went back in the yarang for his rifle and strode away to the ice fields to stalk the seal.

It was a long time since he had last sat in wait for the seal by the ice hole. It was a dreary vigil, waiting endlessly for that foolish seal to thrust its head out for a breath of air. Alitet, however, sat on patiently, sunk deep in thought. He sat thus for a long time, then losing his temper he threw his rifle into the ice hole and said:

"That's the end! I have nothing to do on this coast. It is time to leave for the hills!"

Meeting Tygrena outside the yarang, he shouted:

"Get the dogs, and be quick about it! I must prepare at once for the nomad life."

Alitet's face was grim and terrible when, dressed for the journey, he went up to the sledge where Tygrena was putting the dogs in the traces. She harnessed them eagerly and was unable to conceal her joy at Alitet's departure finally from the settlement. Life with him had become unbearable. She would breathe easier when he was gone.

Alitet cast a venomous glance at Tygrena. "I know what you are thinking about," he said warningly. "Again you have stopped hating the Russians. Your former thoughts are returning. Do not dare go to the teacher. Remember, it will be too bad for you and for the boy."

Tygrena said nothing. She already knew very well that in such cases it was wiser to hold her tongue.

Alitet sat down in the sledge and yelled at the dogs. They tore off. Though dogs must not be allowed to set off at a canter until they have been put through their paces, Alitet did not use the gee pole to brake the sledge.

Tygrena followed the sledge with her eyes until it disappeared behind a hill.

She went back into the yarang with a heavy heart. The future seemed to her so cheerless and disquieting. A sudden sense of foreboding assailed her, and she

stopped and became lost in thought. She wished to unburden her heart to somebody, but with Narginaut and her sister she had long ceased to share her thoughts. She decided to go to Vaamcho and speak with him.

She walked slowly to Vaamcho's yarang. Her legs refused to obey her and sorrow dwelt in her face.

Upon meeting Vaamcho she did not know how to begin the conversation. They stood in silence outside the yarang, gazing in the direction where Alitet's dog team had disappeared.

"He has gone?" Vaamcho said.

Tygrena nodded.

"What is the matter with you, Tygrena? You always pushed me along the path of the new life, and then you turned to the side yourself. They took Aye away to the Mainland not at all in order to kill him there. He should come back. So the teacher said. You have eyes, yet you have ceased to see that the Russians are not our enemies. You just look with your own eyes. The heart of the Russians brings our people joy and friendship. Look around you, Tygrena. How many people have been released from Alitet's trap, and now they are frisking like the polar foxes in the spring! You alone are still sitting in the trap. The Russians want to pull you out of the trap, but you snarl at them. Why is that? Do you like to sit in the trap?"

"No, Vaamcho. I guess my heart will soon burst with anger. How can I like it?"

"There is the new law, Tygrena. If you do not want to live with Alitet, you may leave him. So said the teacher, and so Los told me. I always talk with them about you. When there wasn't the new law that has now come to dwell on the coast, how many times did you not run away from Alitet? And now that the new law is here you do not want to leave him. Why is that?"

"Where shall I go? Have I another husband anywhere?"

"Go to the school yarang. You will tidy up, heat the stoves with coal and boil tea. The teacher will give you ruble papers for doing that. Wakat will quit. She agrees to it. She gets ruble papers all the same for being on the Tribal Soviet. They are quite enough for her. The teacher also said, 'Let Tygreña come.' He will stand up for you. You know how strong he is. Do you forget how he knocked Alitet down?"

"You do not know, Vaamcho, what Alitet has become. His head is going round. He is like a mad wolf. He will not fight the teacher as he did before. He will shoot him, and me, and Aivam. I guess he will shoot you too. He will soon take us all away to the hills. I don't want to go there! I don't want to go! I can't live in the hills."

The boy Goi-Goi, seeing Tygreña standing with Vaamcho, ran off to report it to Korauge.

Narginaut, listening to her son's words, said angrily:

"Be silent. Let Tygreña speak to Vaamcho."

Tygreña came home, and though she did not look at the shaman, she felt his piercing gaze upon her. She sat down with her back to him and resolved mentally to remind that trashy old man that it was time he departed to the dwellers of the Upper World.

"Whose son is this boy 'Aivam?'" she heard Korauge's voice.

Tygreña started, and without turning round to the old man, she said without a trace of deference in her voice:

"I do not feel like talking to you."

"You crazy woman!" shouted the old man. "Bite your tongue quick. It wags too much."

"Leave me alone!" cried Tygreña excitedly. She had an impulse to run up to the old man and stamp on his scrawny neck so that a wheeze came out of it instead of words.

"If you have ceased to fear the anger of the spirits then beware of the anger of Charlie. He will soon return!"

"Stop talking nonsense! You had better think about what your son said to you. All people living on earth are tired of you. It is time for you to go to the dwellers of the Upper World."

"A-a-a!" Korauge groaned. As a sign of his indignation he began beating his head against a skin.

"Tygrena!" came a voice from the passage.

Agitated by her talk with Korauge, Tygrena did not recognize Vaamcho's voice.

Her name being repeated, she swiftly lifted the fur curtain and saw Vaamcho. He motioned his head silently towards the door and went out.

"What has happened? Vaamcho has not come in here for a long time," Tygrena thought. She quickly dressed herself and caught up with him.

"What has happened, Vaamcho?"

"Tygrena, big news has come. Ermen has arrived and he says that Aye has come back from the Mainland. He has become a machine man, a captain. He lives with the Russians at Lavrenti Bay and is building many wooden yarangs..."

"Aye has come back?" Tygrena said, mistrusting her ears. "Then he did not die there?!"

"No, Ermen saw him with his own eyes. He has brought papers to the teacher—one for me and one for you."

Tygrena's eyes opened wide in astonishment. "A paper for me? What for?"

"Let us go to the teacher, Tygrena. He told me to call you. Don't be afraid. We shall stand up for you. You know that I am now the chief of many settlements!"

"Let's go, Vaamcho," Tygrena agreed.

It was warm in the school. The big oil lamp burned as brightly as the sun.

"Hello, Tygrena," the teacher greeted her, giving her his hand. "Sit down. You too, Vaamcho."

The teacher began looking through some papers. Tygrena watched his every movement.

"Tygrena, a letter has come for you from Aye. This is what he writes: 'Tygrena, I, Aye, have returned from the Mainland. I have now become assistant to Andrei. Do you remember him—he visited us together with Los? I have now become quite a different man. If you have not ceased thinking of me, take Aivam and come to me. I spoke to Andrei and Los and they told me: "Let Tygrena come." Now Alitet will not take you away as before. His strength is over. That is all. Aye.'"

It seemed to Tygrena that she was sleeping and seeing a dream. Her head felt dizzy and a mist swam before her eyes. Who knew whether these were really the words of Aye she was hearing, or whether it was the paper itself speaking? She had never heard such words from Aye. And how did Aye learn to put words into the paper? Wasn't the teacher inventing this talk himself?

The rapture in her face was chased away by a look of mistrust.

"Maybe that is not Aye speaking? He was never able to speak on paper," Tygrena said in a low voice.

Dvorkin got up and showed her the letter. "Look, Tygrena," he said gently. "Here is the letter. Aye himself wrote it. I guess he has learnt to write the way my pupils have learnt. They, too, were unable to speak on paper before. I am telling you the truth—Aye wrote it."

Tygrena took the paper gingerly and looked into it, but nothing there reminded her of Aye. She peered hard at the paper, trying in vain to fathom the meaning of all those hooks and curls scattered over it. She turned the paper over and suddenly cried out in amazement:

"Look, Vaamcho, look! This is a drawing of Yan-rakenot, where Aye and I lived when we were children.



Look, here is the yarang of my father Kamenvat, there is Aye's yarang, and there the yarangs of the neighbours. There were ten yarangs in all. They are all here. And that is our mountain. Aye always used to draw this settlement on the snow with a stick. This is his drawing!"

Dvorkin listened with a smile to Tygrena's excited outburst.

"I am telling you, Tygrena, that this paper was written by Aye. I am not making it up. I have no wish whatever to make fun of your misfortunes. I am telling you the truth. Aye is calling you to go to him. Go at once. Don't be afraid of anything. You will find protectors there. You should have left that damned Alitet a long time ago. You go tomorrow together with Vaamcho. He is being called out there to the feast."

Tygrena threw Vaamcho a questioning look.

"Let us go, Tygrena, otherwise Alitet will take you away to the hills. It will be more difficult to run away from there."

Tygrena got up hastily. "Let us go, Vaamcho," she said with determination.

She ran home breathless. Aivam sat holding round little sea pebbles, chuckling and crowing to himself. Tygrena picked him up in her arms and searched his face closely.

"Play, Aivam," she said.

"Where have you been?" Korauge snarled. "You went to the teacher? Trollop!"

Tygrena found it hard to hold her peace, for the old man's squeaky voice exasperated her. She was loath to enter into conversation with him, however. And so she said nothing.

"I know where you've been!" the old man cried in a

shrill voice. "You have added to your misdeeds. Ah, you will rue it, yes, you will!"

Aivam went up to the old man and showed him his pebbles.

"Take that brat away! He is not of our blood, the wolf cub!"

And the shaman pushed his hard bony hand straight into the child's face.

The boy cried out and fell down on the skins. Blood trickled from his nose.

Tygreña threw herself upon the old man. She scooped him up in her powerful arms and then swung the limp body hard onto the pebbled floor of the passage. The old man came down with a crash and lay spread out and motionless.

Tygreña, her face flushed, picked up Aivam and ran off to the teacher.

"I want to go at once!" she cried.

Vaamcho came running after her.

"Harness the dogs, Vaamcho! I want to go at once!"

"At once?" Vaamcho said in surprise. "It is night now. We shall go in the morning."

"The moon will soon shine out. Let us go now. Go, Vaamcho, go!" she said, hustling him out.

"Teacher, let Aivam be here a while. I think I had better harness our own dogs."

Narginaut ran out in considerable agitation.

"The old man is dying," she said in a whisper.

"Let him die," Tygreña answered indifferently.

"Yes, I guess it's time for him to die," Narginaut agreed.

Tygreña, quivering with anger, swiftly harnessed the dogs and rode up to the school where Vaamcho's sledge stood ready.

She picked up her son, took the gee pole and sat down in the sledge.

"Let us go, Vaamchol"

"Wait, Tygrena, I have something to say to the teacher."

"What is it, Vaamcho?" asked Dvorkin, who was seeing them off.

"Let Alek and the child live in your school until I come back."

"All right," the teacher said.

As soon as the sledges left the settlement behind them and the yarangs disappeared from view, Tygrena stopped her dog team.

"Vaamcho, hitch my dogs to your sledge. It is difficult for me to drive the team."

Vaamcho hitched the dogs to his own sledge, and the twenty-four dogs set off along the seacoast in a long winding line.

Tygrena sat next to Vaamcho, pressing Aivam to her bosom.

"Tygrena, did you kill the old man?" Vaamcho asked.

"No, he killed himself."

Up in the sky the moon was bright behind a veil of clouds—it heralded a blizzard.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

By the October holidays two huge houses had sprung up on the pebbly spit at Lavrenti Bay—the boarding school and the hospital. The chimneys were already smoking, and the building workers moved into warm quarters.

Such is the tradition of Soviet people—to commemorate the anniversary of their great holiday by new work achievements. And so did men celebrate this holiday on the shores of the cold northern sea.

Red streamers fluttered on tall flagstaffs from the roofs of the buildings.

Winter had come in real earnest.

All around lay dog teams tied to hitching posts. The hunters and trappers walked round the buildings, peering with curiosity into all corners of this amazing Russian settlement. The master of this settlement was Andrei Mikhailovich Zhukov.

People were astonished at this Russian youth's sudden affluence. Why, the first time he came to them he had nothing but a dog team. Now he had come back quite a different man. Even a moustache had grown!

"Look," men said, "look how much wood he has brought to our woodless country."

The building of the future hospital contained a "Titan"* which created quite a sensation. Oh, it was a wonderful kettle! It had a constant supply of boiling water, and so tea drinking here, begun first thing in the morning, continued till late in the evening. Mary was the mistress here. She was dressed in a white smock which made her conspicuous among the mass of the people, who were dressed in furs. Mary was proud of the fact that she had been entrusted with entertaining the guests who arrived for the Big Feast. She was the mistress of the "Titan," the tea, sugar and bags of biscuits. What a pleasure it was to treat people! Such a multitude of guests had never gathered at Charlie Thompson's house.

The large classroom, where Andrei put up for the time being, also presented a scene of considerable animation. Los was here, and his wife Natalia Semyonovna and Yarak.

Los, for the first time since his arrival on the Chukotsk Peninsula, wore civilian clothes.

Andrei and even Yarak also wore suits. Andrei was saying that by the end of the year they had to build the houses for the veterinary-zootechnical station, dwelling

* A type of water heater.—*Trans.*

houses with comfortable apartments, a dining room, bakery, laundry and workshops for the repair of out-board motors, traps and rifles.

Los looked at Yarak with admiration and said:

"You just look at Yarak, Andrei—he's a different man!"

"Aye and Mary made me put this on," Yarak said in confusion, apologizing, as it were, for his costume. "Aye said that in Moscow everyone dresses up for the Big Feast. He tied on this noose himself," Yarak murmured, jerking a long gaudy tie. "Los has also dressed up, I see. I never saw him in such clothes before."

"Splendid, Yarak, splendid!" Los said. "How are you working with the new trading-post manager, Yarak?"

"Good, very good, Comrade Los! Smelov is a right man. He always calls me and asks, 'Well, Yarak, what do you say?'"

"He asks your advice, eh?"

"Yes, yes. We work well. I tell him—we must move the trading post out here, nearer to the cultural centre. When men come to do trade they will visit the school and the hospital. The trading post can be quickly moved out on whaleboats in the spring."

"Andrei Mikhailovich," Los said in animation, addressing Zhukov for the first time by his name and patronymic. "That's an interesting idea! Don't you see, we can make this the economic centre in addition to the cultural one. That's fine. Establish an inn here, say, a Hunters' House. Install an educational worker in it, decorate the walls with posters, bring out a movie projector. Can you imagine what work we could develop here among visitors! The number of people that visit the trading post! You've made a very valuable proposal, Yarak."

"It's a brilliant idea!" Andrei said. "We'll have to get it done. How is it I didn't think of it in Moscow? They'd have given me another house without saying a

word. Good boy, Yarak! We'll certainly take up your idea."

Yarak listened to this conversation with a keen sense of satisfaction. He did not know what "idea" meant, but he realized that he had made a sound suggestion, and he resumed again excitedly:

"Of course, we must move the trading post out here. Smelov thinks so too. Mary will want to work in the big hospital—how shall we live then? In different places?"

"Quite right, Yarak," Los concurred. "We'll move the trading post."

"We'll have to order another house," Andrei said.

"What for? You've got one ready. That little hospital at Loren is closing down. Doctor Pyotr Petrovich is going to be transferred to this one. We'll bring the hospital building over—and there you have your Hunters' House."

"And appoint me educational worker in it," Natalia Semyonovna suggested.

"No, nothing doing. How shall we live then? In different places?" Los said with a grin at Yarak, seeking sympathy as it were in that quarter. "That means transferring the Revcom here too, eh?"

Aye burst into the room, and his eyes flew wide open in astonishment.

"Kakomeil!" he cried. "Los! Natasha—my travel comrade!"

"How do you do, Aye! We've also come to your holiday. Natasha here has even been missing you. I haven't seen Aye for a long time, she said."

Natalia Semyonovna, who had conceived a warm affection for Aye and really missed him, gave him her hand with a smile.

"Well, Aye, how are you living?" she asked affectionately.

"We are living well. Building houses, making holidays."

"Where do you live?"

"Right here, my room is next to Andrei's. Come, I will show you."

They went into Aye's room. It resembled a workshop rather than a living bedroom. Hunters were sitting on Aye's bed before the table, examining the parts of an outboard motor. A trestle stood in the middle of the room fastened to the floor with bolts, on which hung an assembled outboard motor.

"How do you do, comrades!" Natalia Semyonovna greeted the hunters.

"This is Los' wife and my friend. I stayed with her in Vladivostok," Aye said proudly and gaily, introducing Natalia Semyonovna.

The company consisted mainly of young lads who were training to become motorists. Natalia Semyonovna, to their no little confusion, shook hands all round.

"Aye, what is this, a room or a workshop?"

"The workshops haven't been built yet. For the time being they are here. Because I must show men the motor. Ermen, open the window, I'll show you."

Aye went up to the motor on the trestle and pulled the cord of the flywheel. The motor started working with a loud clatter and the room instantly filled with smoke.

Los, Andrei and Yarak came running in at the noise.

"Say, what goes on?" Los cried. "It's a factory here!"

Aye switched off the motor. "I was just demonstrating a little," he said gravely. "The smoke will go out through the window."

"Let it. Aye, let's go to Andrei's room," Natalia Semyonovna proposed.

In that room stood a bed, a table and a wardrobe. The room was in disorder. All kinds of drawings, papers and books were strewn on the table.

"Andrei Mikhailovich," Natalia Semyonovna said in a tone of reproach, "the way you live doesn't fill me with admiration. What do you call this? Aye's room is a cross between a workshop, a bedroom and a warehouse. Yours doesn't fit into any category either. You ought to live in a civilized manner, my dear comrade."

Los grinned. "You brought only one woman, and criticism's started already."

Andrei was embarrassed. "In the first place, Natalia Semyonovna, I just now saw Aye's room in this state the first time myself. And he arranged all that in honour of the holiday, no doubt."

"I put up the motor last night," Aye said.

"In the second place," Andrei went on, "we haven't acquired wives yet and are baching it. In the third place, we moved in here out of tents just before you came. If you visit us on May Day you'll find no cause for your stern and just remarks. We'll have three houses with regular apartments and modern improvements."

"You're right, you're right, Andrei, old boy," Los joined in. "Moscow wasn't built in a day either. Wait awhile, Natasha. There's a time for everything. Andrei's sweetheart graduates from university this year and will be here at the end of the navigation season. You just watch what magnificent chambers arise here before her arrival," Los said, glancing slyly at Andrei. "Well, all right. What's your plan for the festivities?"

"Today we'll hold a celebration meeting and tomorrow contests. A dog team race, target shooting, wrestling. We'll give prizes. First prize for the dog team race, for instance, is a Winchester."

"A Winchester?"

"Don't be surprised, Nikita Sergeyevich. I have funds for it. You just ask Aye how high interest is running after

the men learned that the first prize is a Winchester. It's a grand stimulus for improving the breed of the dogs."

"Well, all right. We'll see."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Vaamcho and Tygrena were held up by the blizzard. They arrived at the cultural service base just as the festivities commenced. Leaving Aivam in Rultyna's yarang, they rode up to the big Russian settlement with its huge, brightly-lit houses. Vaamcho caught a glimpse through the snow-plastered window of a numerous audience sitting on benches.

"Let us go inside, Tygrena. You see there is nobody outside. I guess it is a big meeting, and all the people are there," Vaamcho said, tearing himself away from the window.

They passed down a corridor and found themselves in a large room packed with people. People even stood in the aisles. Vaamcho squeezed through the crowd, and craning his neck, tried to catch what Los was saying. Tygrena, with bated breath, looked at the raised platform on which Russians and Chukchi sat before a table. Suddenly she caught sight of Aye among them. He sat among the Tangs and he himself was dressed like a Tang. He was whispering animatedly, now to Andrei, now to Mary who sat beside him. It seemed to Tygrena that Aye had become a stranger. He was wrapped in cloth clothes, like Los and Andrei. And his hair? How ugly it lay on his head!

"So that is him, the machine man!" Tygrena thought, devouring him with her eyes. She did not hear what Los was saying. "Aye has become a stranger! Why did he ask me to come? Or was the teacher lying to me, trying to make me believe that his words were Aye's? But the drawing was his!"



A bitter feeling swept over Tygrena. She felt hot and utterly miserable. She could not force herself to stay here, and decided to go out in the frost. The stinging cold would drive the painful thoughts from her head, as snow damps the campfire.

Tygrena had turned towards the door when she suddenly heard Aye's voice:

"Natalia Semyonovna will now speak."

"Yes, that is Aye's real voice. His voice has not changed a bit. It is only stronger and more confident."

The white-faced woman mounted the platform.

"This is a very good woman," Aye explained. "We travelled together on the steamer from the Mainland."

The woman strode up self-confidently to the table, said something to Aye in an undertone and smiled at him.

Then her face grew very grave, even severe, and she started speaking very quickly, something that was entirely unintelligible. Tygrena stared at her fixedly. This was the first time she had seen a white-faced woman. She noticed that Aye was also looking at this woman and listening to her as though she were telling a beautiful fairy tale. "Maybe it was this white-faced woman who spoilt Aye, made his hair that way and wrapped him in Russian clothes? Such a woman could easily talk over any man. Look at the way the words endlessly tumble from her tongue!" Tygrena thought resentfully.

Natalia Semyonovna suddenly broke off, leaned over to Aye and said something to him again.

Aye got up, straightened his cloth sack with the slit down the middle, and said in a cheery tone:

"I will now interpret what Natalia Semyonovna has been saying. Afterwards she will speak some more. She said: women must be equal with men. . . ."

Tygrena pricked up her ears, and rage and indignation flamed in her face. "Oh, so he has learnt to lie as

well," she thought. "Has he forgotten that the birth of a girl child is considered only half a joy? Does he not know that women were never equal with men? Or has he forgotten how Alitet stole me from under his own nose? What is he talking about? Or does he think that nothing of this happened? Aye is no longer Aye. He thinks at one with that white-faced Russian woman."

And Tygrena was so enraged that she cried out:

"He lies!"

Aye turned his head at Tygrena's voice, and rising up on his toes, caught sight of her. In a flash he sprang down from the platform and elbowed his way towards her through the crowd that stood in the doorway.

Tygrena, however, had disappeared. Aye ran outside, looking for her. The moon was shining brightly. The logs of the new house crackled from the frost and the snow crunched underfoot. The sky glittered with myriads of stars. Somewhere dogs were howling in chorus.

Tygrena pressed close to the wall of the house. She raised the wolverine-trimmed hood of her parka and her eyes, as though out of a burrow, watched Aye. She saw him searching for her with his eyes. He probably did not feel very warm in those cloth clothes of his. And what trousers?! Like those the Mericans wore in the summer. She watched him in silence.

Then Aye suddenly caught sight of her.

"Tygrena!" he cried delightedly.

He sprang towards her, took hold of the fur hood and peered into her flashing eyes.

"Go away!" she said angrily. "You've forgotten all about me!"

"How long I have been waiting for you, Tygrena! My eyes got tired from looking at the sledges that arrived. You were lost, like a reindeer in a blizzard..."

Tygrena listened to him in silence, and suddenly there came to her the memory of how they had stood thus out-

side, the yarang in Yanrakenot talking about their future life.

And she asked softly:

"The paper that Ermen brought—was it your paper?"

"Yes, yes!" Aye cried joyfully. "I wrote it myself. And I made the drawing on it."

"I have run away from Alitet again. And I shall not go back to him any more. I will better kill myself!" she said vehemently.

"That is fine!" Aye cried delightedly, stamping his feet to keep warm.

"I guess I killed the shaman Korauge, Aye. I did not mean to kill him. I only threw him out into the passage after he made Aivam's nose bleed."

"Don't be afraid, Tygrena. Oh, how strong I have become! In Moscow all the chiefs are friends of mine. Now we have nothing to fear..."

Aye knew very well that mention of the chiefs in that unknown place Moscow would make no impression on Tygrena, yet the words fell from his tongue of their own accord. Noticing her indifference to what he was saying, he promptly changed the topic.

"And where is the little one?"

"I left him with Rultyna for the time being. She is a good kind woman."

"We must take him from her."

"No. Wait... Have you remained the same? Why has that Russian woman spoilt you, by whose tongue you have just been uttering unwise things. Look what clothes you wear. You will freeze in them even in summer. And your hair has become ugly too."

"These are indoor clothes, Tygrena. One can always change one's clothes. Clothes are not the heart."

"And that white-faced woman who spoke through your tongue—who is she? What has she come to our country for?"

"Don't you know? She is Los' wife."

"She is Los' wife?" Tygrena said in surprise.

"She also is a chief."

"Can women be chiefs? I do not seem to have heard of such things," Tygrena said, incredulous.

"She will be the chief of the woman's question."

"What is that—'woman's question'?"

"It's the new law about women. A good law. She knows all about you. She said she will help you leave Alitet. Oh, she is a very good woman! We were together on the Mainland and sailed on the boat together."

"Aye, it seemed to me that you had become a stranger, not a real man," Tygrena said softly.

"No, Tygrena!" Aye cried warmly. "Do your eyes not see what I am? Do your ears not hear the words I speak? I am the same I always was. Only now I have become a very strong man under the new law. You will see how I shall deal with Alitet if he shows himself here."

At the first moment of their meeting Tygrena had got a malicious satisfaction from the fact that Aye was freezing in his Tang clothes, but now she felt sorry for him. Seeing how he shivered, she said:

"Go and warm yourself, Aye. Run to that hill."

Aye was off in a bound, with waving arms and flashing legs. He forgot the meeting, forgot that he was the interpreter there.

A light suddenly flashed near Tygrena. She started and covered her face with her hands.

"Did I frighten you?" said Natalia Semyonovna, switching off the flashlight.

She put her arm round Tygrena's waist, and her hand was buried in the soft furs. Natalia Semyonovna said gently:

"Look, it is an electric torch."

The light went on again. Tygrena studied the Russian woman in silence; then becoming emboldened, she touched

the thick glass of the flashlight with her finger. The light was cold.

"Why are you standing here all by yourself? Such an elegant woman, too!"

Tygrena did not understand what the white-faced woman was saying, but it was curious to be standing next to her and listening to her unintelligible speech. "So that is what she is like, the wife of the bearded chief. Maybe she really is a good woman?" Tygrena debated with herself.

Breathless and flushed with the swift run and the cold, his bared head covered with rime and steaming, Aye dashed up.

"Why did you run away from the meeting? A fine interpreter you are! Andrei had to do the interpreting," Natalia Semyonovna said.

"Tygrena has come, there she is!" Aye said, smiling happily.

"Oh, I see! This is Tygrena!"

"Yes, yes. She has run away from Alilet for good now."

"But let us go into Andrei's room. You will freeze out here, Aye."

"No, I am hot," he answered, glowing with happiness.

It was warm in Andrei Zhukov's room, and they could talk here without being interrupted.

Natalia Semyonovna wished to speak with Tygrena, of whom she had heard a good deal and who had long interested her. Natalia Semyonovna was impatient to start on her duties as manager of the department for work among the women.

She began speaking warmly about the position of women in the Soviet land. She spoke long and with agitated fluency, and Aye was hard put to it in the capacity of interpreter.

While Natalia Semyonovna was thus zealously en-

lightening Tygrena, Andrei quietly came up and halted in the doorway, listening to the conversation. When Natalia Semyonovna finally stopped talking he said with a forbearing smile:

"And you think you've explained it? Out here, Natalia Semyonovna, we do all this differently. In a word, you don't make the grade as a political instructor."

"Well, you explain it then if you know how," she said. There was a note of wounded feeling in her voice.

"You're too quick, Natalia Semyonovna. Everything in good time. Hasn't Los briefed you on the situation here?"

"I see that you and Los have become as lazy as a pair of mules here. I suppose you never got around to talking to this woman."

Andrei greeted Tygrena and said to Aye:

"Los is looking for you, Aye. He is talking to the people about the whaleboats, the outboard motors and the training courses."

"Tygrena, I shall soon be back," Aye said, and ran out.

"Andrei, why don't you invite the girl to take her things off. It's hot in here!" Natalia Semyonovna said irritably.

"She can't take them off. She's wearing a travelling overall outfit. She'd have to take her boots off first. You're in the wrong yet you're angry. And you built up your speech at the meeting wrong too, Natalia Semyonovna."

"Are you trying to teach me! . . . In the district committee in Vladivostok—"

"On the Mainland your speech would have been excellent," Andrei interrupted. "But here—" He shrugged his shoulders and added: "Just so many words. Without taking into account the local life and habits. You ask Los how he prepared his speeches. He'd spend a week on

one! And he got results. This job only looks easy. It's a good thing Aye ran out. . . . You'll forgive me, but as interpreter I took liberties with your speech."

"Why, what do you mean?" Natalia Semyonovna asked, upsel.

"Well, we'll talk about that later." Then, turning to Tygrena he said, "Sit down, Tygrena, here next to the table. We shall drink tea. Do you remember how we drank tea with old Vaal? He was a good man!"

"Yes," Tygrena said softly and timidly, watching the Russians.

Tygrena thought that Andrei, the young chief, was scolding the Russian woman for having brought her, Alitet's wife, into his dwelling. She drew up to the table, and slipped her parka off with a movement of her shoulders. It fell to her waist and the wolverine-trimmed sleeves dangled to the floor. She wore underneath a bright red dress. Her face was flushed with the heat. Two thick braids of hair hung down her high bosom. With a toss of her head she flung the plaits over her shoulders.

"Drink tea, Tygrena. It gives me pleasure to have you as my guest. Now Alitet, I wouldn't even give a cup of tea. He is a bad man," Andrei said, seeming to guess her thoughts.

Tygrena looked up at Andrei and said:

"I have run away from him and will not go back to Enmakai. I guess he will want to come here and take me away. He has become very vicious."

"That's all right, Tygrena. Here he'll be as meek as a hare. We'll chase him out of here so that he won't forget it till his dying day."

"I don't know. . . . Has Aye got a yarang here?"

"Of course he has. His room is next to mine."

Natalia Semyonovna was now listening to the unintelligible conversation and following the expression on Tygrena's face.

"Andrei, be a good boy and translate word for word everything she says. You yourself will never understand a woman anyway."

"Learn to speak yourself."

"Now you're talking nonsense, Andrei Mikhailovich. You know perfectly well I can't learn the language in one day." Natalia Semyonovna flared up. "I really had a higher opinion of you."

"Wait, Natalia Semyonovna, wait a minute. I don't want to interrupt this conversation with her."

"I am having a hard life," Tygrena said. "How many winters it has been dragging on! My heart all the time wants to scream with pain. How many times I wanted to kill myself! . . ."

Los and Aye came in.

"Now, that's not nice. People have gathered in there and you are sitting here by yourselves," Los said.

"There's important business here too, Nikita Sergeyevich," Andrei said, glancing at Aye with a smile. "It looks like a wedding."

"That's fine! I like to celebrate weddings. Is this Tygrena? How do you do, Tygrena!" Los said with a merry smile, holding his hand out to her. She gave him hers very timidly.

Los spoke to her kindly and gently. Aye, watching them, experienced the happiest moments of his life. His heart was so brimful of joy that his legs began to tremble. He sat down on the floor in his new suit.

Los laughed and joked. Tygrena had never seen him like this before; she had not thought that this man with the beard knew how to laugh.

"Well?" Los said. "We'll make a marriage paper." Catching sight of Aye on the floor near the door he threw his arms apart. "Friend, why are you sitting there? Did you learn that in Moscow?"

"I forgot," Aye muttered in embarrassment.

Yarak and Vaamcho came in.

"Where's Mary?" Los asked.

"She'll be entertaining the arrivals all night long now," Vaamcho said. "She's very fond of that."

"Well, all right. Sit down, Vaamcho."

Vaamcho, however, felt constrained. Aye and Yarak were in Russian clothes. He thought they had ceased being his comrades.

"Take your things off, Vaamcho," Andrei proposed. "Be my guest."

Vaamcho, embarrassed, said softly:

"The teacher gave me a shirt but in my hurry I forgot to put it on."

"Ah, so that's it? Well, come with me."

They went to Aye's room, and very soon Vaamcho returned in a shirt and jacket.

When Tygrena saw him in this outfit she burst into a trill of laughter.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The holiday guests wandered over the building site in crowds. They examined everything with curiosity. How much wood there was here! One could make an oar out of every little board. Every splinter was precious in this woodless country.

The attention of the guests was attracted to two huge houses which had sprung up so suddenly here. The sea margin, since time immemorial, had been the exclusive haunt of innumerable flocks of ducks—the whitewings, the forktails and the silvery feathered. The brisk little stilt birds had run undisturbed over the alluvial sands.

Somewhat away from the shore had been the haunt of other summer residents—swans, white and blue geese, crested larks, and snowbirds. Quiet and peaceful places they had been!

Now this beach was encumbered with logs and boards and various building materials.

Ever since the ships had gone these peaceful spots daily resounded to the knocking of axes, the rasping of saws and the hum of Soviet people. Unusual things were happening on this coast.

Doctor Pyotr Petrovich stood amid a crowd of hunters and trappers, showing them a paper target of the regulation pattern. He jabbed his finger at the rings, explaining excitedly in universally popular language.

"Bang! Bang!"

The hunters laughed and shook their heads. They stood with their Winchesters, waiting for the shooting contest to begin. On the side lay bottles, their bottoms glinting.

An elderly hunter went up to the doctor and pushed the paper target aside. He pointed to the bottles and said with an air of utter gravity:

"The head of a seal lies on the water like a bottle on the snow. Paper no good, bottle good. It is just like a seal in the water."

The doctor stuck doggedly to his guns:

"Bang! Bang!"

Here and there rifle shots rang out. The men were practising.

Los arrived with Andrei, Yarak, Aye, Tygrena and Natalia Semyonovna. The women visitors had quickly made friends and were conversing noisily. Tygrena wished to be gay, too, but a sense of doubt about her conduct disconcerted her. There were too many curious eyes.

A little beyond stood a throng of women dressed in their best clothes. Upon seeing Tygrena they fell to whispering among themselves, and Tygrena knew only too well that it was her they were whispering about. The women themselves were not altogether sure what view to take of Tygrena's conduct. Even the old men were

baffled. Tygrena's flight and the fact that she had placed herself under the protection of the Russians presented a perplexing problem. She had violated the custom of the people, but then Alitet had violated it too. The Russians approved of her—look how kindly they were talking to her!

Ilyich stood slightly apart and keenly watched Tygrena's face. After a while he went up to her and said:

"Tygrena, these Russians are just people. They are seekers of the truth. You were long ago betrothed to Aye. Now the Russians have helped you."

Tygrena hung on the old man's lips and her heart grew happier by the minute. She smiled and said:

"Thank you, Ilyich. You have a kind heart."

"Go, Tygrena, take part in the contest. You are a good shot, aren't you?"

The hunters were already sitting on the snow with knees raised high to steady their rifles on.

"Tygrena, take this rifle, it is a very good rifle," Aye said.

Tygrena's eyes shone with excitement. She carefully examined the Winchester and fingered the sight, then returned it to Aye.

"I shall not shoot, Aye. It is hard to shoot with a strange rifle. If I miss, people will laugh at me."

"It is a good rifle, it is my own."

"No! There is enough gossip about me as it is. You shoot."

Rifle shots could already be heard. The hunters sat waiting their turn with impatience. Besides the honour and universal recognition the winner was to receive a primus stove, a tin of kerosene and ten packets of cartridges.

Everyone took aim at his respective bottle with bated breath. The ceaseless crash of rifle fire thrilled all men's

hearts. Over three hundred shots had already been fired, a salute, as it were, to the new holiday on these cold shores.

Boys kept running up to the bottles calling out the names of the hunters whose shots had gone home. The excitement waxed high.

"Aye," Tygrena suddenly said, "give me the rifle."

"Take it, take it!" Aye said joyously, giving it to her. "Vaamcho made only two hits out of three."

As she sat down on the snow Tygrena looked at Vaamcho and said with a laugh:

"Oh, Vaamcho! You lost the primus stove."

Vaamcho, confused, said nothing.

Tygrena's shot rang out, and Aye rushed away to inspect her target.

"A hit, a hit!" he shouted joyfully. He stepped aside one pace and cried, "Shoot again!"

"Move farther away. If her hand shakes something may happen!" a voice shouted from the crowd.

"Shoot, Tygrena, shoot!" Aye cried insistently. He trusted Tygrena's eye as he did his own.

The second shot hit the mark. Then Aye seized a bottle and balanced it in his hand with the bottom facing Tygrena.

"Shoot, Tygrena," he shouted. "Let the bottle be in my hand!"

Tygrena lowered her rifle.

"The lad is out of his senses!" old Ilyich said reprovingly. "Make him put the bottle down on the snow."

A third shot rang out, and the bullet went wide of the mark.

"Aye spoilt my aim," Tygrena said, annoyed.

Vaamcho threw her a smile of sympathy.

At midday the dog races began. Dozens of sledges stood lined up. The dogs whined and tugged eagerly at their traces.

They were harnessed in festive style, not strung out in a line, but fanwise. Four dogs were hitched in the shaft, then three, and then two, with the lead dog in front. Each sledge had ten dogs. Harnessed this way they could all be got at with the whip.

The excitement grew apace. Men stood arguing loudly, waving their arms violently, trying to guess who would win the race.

Ilyich pattered busily about the sledge of his son Ermen. He hastily reharnessed the dogs from one place to another and gave his son final instructions. Then he tweaked the ear of the lead dog and ran aside.

Who did not want to win such a prize as a new Winchester and twenty packets of cartridges! True, there was a second and third prize, but they were nothing to speak of in comparison with the rifle—just a sack of flour, several lengths of cotton print, tobacco and other trifles.

"Well, Ilyich, what do you say?" Los asked gaily.

The old man winked a knowing eye, then ran up to the lead dog again and adjusted his breech band.

"What team are you betting on, Andrei Mikhailovich?" the doctor asked.

"I'm betting on Aye."

"And I on Yarak."

"Oho! No flies on you fellows, I see," Los said. "Aye is running on Alitet's team, and Yarak on Thompson's."

"Don't you want to take part in this betting, Nikita Sergeyevich?" the doctor asked.

"I do! I bet on Ermen."

Andrei laughed.

"Why, Nikita Sergeyevich, he's got cats, not dogs!"

"Don't you worry. I'll laugh last. D'you want to make a bet on it?"

"What's the stakes?"

"If Ermen comes first you give me your Ryzhik. If Aye wins you can choose any dog you like from my team."

"I take you on," Andrei said. "But I feel sorry for you—you'll lose."

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched. It's a go then?"

"Yes. I'm giving the signal"

Andrei fired a shot from the prize Winchester.

The team drivers were off in a flash, amid shouts and wild whoops and the crack of whips. One team got tangled up at the very start. The driver, amid general laughter, jumped out of the sledge, swiftly disentangled the dogs and dashed off again, plying his whip furiously. After a while the leading sledges swept into view over the hillside and a stir ran through the crowd. The spectators yelled in a frenzy of excitement and waved their mittens and caps as though they themselves were driving the sledges.

"Yarak! Yarak!"

"Aye! Aye!"

As was to be expected, these two teams of husky dogs ran in the lead. The dogs galloped at full pelt, neck and neck, their eyes gleaming wildly. If one team for a second shot ahead, the other would immediately make a spurt and catch up with it.

At the crucial moment Aye sprang up onto his knees and lashed the dogs with his whip. The team spurted forward. Yarak's dogs put on a burst of speed and hurled themselves headlong upon Aye's team. Pandemonium followed, a snarling snapping fracas. The dogs dug their fangs into each other paying no heed to the blows of the whips.

Yarak and Aye frantically dragged them apart.

Ermen's team flashed past, keeping slightly to the side. Ermen stood up in the sledge bareheaded, gripping the crosspiece with one hand and savagely whipping the dogs with the other.

The excitement among the crowd rose to fever pitch.

Old Ilyich flung his mitten down in the snow, tore off his cap and yelled wildly:

"Come on! Come on, Ermen, come on!"

Los, waving his arms, took up the old man's cry.

Ermen came in first. Vaamcho dashed in upon his heels.

Los ran up to Andrei, breathless with excitement, and cried laughingly:

"Andrei! Let's have your Ryzhik!"

Ilyich fondled the lead dog, which lay sprawled on the snow with its hot tongue hanging out. Ermen also lay on the snow; he was wiping his perspiring face.

"I knew it. Charlie and Alitet got into a fight. I didn't tell the lads not to ride side by side. They have something to learn from the oldsters," said Ilyich, proud of his cunning.

Contest followed contest till late in the evening. There was a race of young hunters, girls' racing, weight lifting and wrestling. The hunters, who were passionately fond of sports, always celebrated their work fetes, such as the "Walrus Killing," the "Whale Feast" and the "B-darka Raising" by tests of strength, skill and endurance.

But never had there been such contests as took place that day near the big wooden yarangs of the Russians. This new holiday born of the October Revolution was a holiday of the new life and the people's joy; it embodied all the finest traits of the nationality and it created a universal gay mood.

Old Ilyich stood with narrowed eyes listening attentively to what the "sack" man was saying.

Dr. Pyotr Petrovich was explaining the conditions of a new form of contest—the sack race. A crowd of people stood around him. Forty sacks had been brought up.



Suddenly Ilyich pushed forward and asked for a sack. "I have forgotten the days when nobody could run faster than I," he said with a grin as he climbed into a sack. "I had intended dying without ever knowing again the joy and happiness of one who takes part in a contest. But no! Now I see that I too must climb into a sack."

He stood in the sack holding it up at the level of his stomach and waited alertly for the signal.

The husky young men, who had stood with their feet wide apart in the sacks, tried to make a quick start but immediately fell down. They hastily rose, rocking with laughter, and again attempted to dash forward. But the more they hurried the more often they fell. The crowd roared.

Meanwhile Ilyich with a grave expression on his face calmly shuffled forward. He caught up with the youths, outstripped them and, not turning to look back as they did, was the first to reach the line, without falling once. Here he wheeled about, sank to the snow, leaped up nimbly and started on the return lap.

A burst of laughter rent the air. Ilyich had won. He lay on the snow, shouting:

"Quick, pull this sack off me quick so that I can take the four packages of tobacco!"

Tygrena ran up to him and pulled off the sack.

"Where is the 'sack' man? I thank you. Los made me a present of life, and you have brought back my youth. Quick, give me the tobacco!"

The crowd rocked with irrepressible laughter.

"Those lads also have something to learn from the oldsters," Ilyich uttered in a moralizing tone:

"See what a feast this is, Tygrena?" Aye said proudly. "Andrei and I arranged it together. I am his helper!"



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The rumour of old Korauge's death and Tygrena's flight reached Alitet when he was still in the hills. His father's death left him entirely cold—nothing had happened that he had not been long expecting. Alitet merely commented, "I told him to go to the dwellers of the Upper World himself. Now death has taken him unawares."

The only witness of the shaman Korauge's death, the old wife Narginaut, was glad that his life was ended. Although she knew Alitet's sentiments she concealed the true cause of the old man's death, fearing to arouse his wrath. She did not even tell her sister Atteneut, the third wife.

After Tygrena's departure, Narginaut had quickly dragged the body of the old man into the polog and hastened to inform the neighbours that Korauge had gone to the dwellers of the Upper World. He had probably died because he had got very angry with Tygrena.

Tygrena's flight, however, threw Alitet into a towering passion. Dropping his business in the hills he dashed off for home the very same day. He resolved to bring her back at all costs, though he was aware of the difficulties that lay in his path. He realized only too well that different times had come and that Tygrena's flight had not been made without the Russians' intervention in her lot. He was perfectly aware that recovering Tygrena now was not going to be such a simple affair as bringing back a runaway dog. The knowledge infuriated him, and he drove the dogs like a madman for two days and nights without stopping, meanwhile devising various ways of bringing Tygrena back.

He thought of Liok, that thrifty old man, his friend. Alitet always stopped with him when he travelled that way. But even he seemed to have lost his senses and joined the artel. What was happening on the coast?!

Alitet found no answer to all these tormenting thoughts. He came tearing home, questioned Narginaut at length about what had happened, and set off immediately in pursuit of Tygrena. He thought of Liok again and their old friendship, and decided to look him up after all. He would try to tear him away from the Russians and perhaps obtain his help in getting Tygrena back. "The Russians listen to him," Alitet thought. "He will tell them about our law and her shameful flight."

Alitet heard that a big feast was going to be held at Lavrenti Bay to which people had been invited from all over the coast. The news also reached him that Liok too had been invited to this Russian feast, but had not gone.

When the time arrived to leave for the feast Liok was seized with pains in the back, and he went about almost doubled up, his hand clasping his back, groaning, "Ee-ee-ee!" He groaned as if in pain, but you couldn't deceive people. People knew that Liok never groaned when in pain. He groaned because he was unable to go to the feast.

And so, when Alitet came into his yarang, Liok was overjoyed.

"You have come?" Liok greeted him.

"Yes. I have come on important business," Alitet said, enheartened by the warm reception.

He lolled on the reindeer skins, got out his pipe, and to emphasize the importance of his visit he struck a thick American match, lit his pipe and broached the subject in a roundabout way.

"There will be no more Merican matches if the Russians stay here long."

"Let's not talk about matches. Matches are not the important thing," Liok rejoined, using Los' words. "Fire is the same whether it comes from a Merican match, a Russian match or two sticks. Fire is fire. All fire is hot."

Alitet was so taken aback by these arguments of Liok's that he merely stared at the old man. He did not know what to say next.

"You have become an artel man?"

"Yes, I have. I have decided to try the new life. It is not a bad life at all. Plenty of meat!"

"Yes, it's not a bad life," Alitet chimed in. "Only those Russians are quarrelsome people. They have sown enmity among our people."

"I don't seem to have noticed that," Liok said blandly, fixing his single eye on Alitet.

"The Mericans were better."

"Better?" Liok queried, and promptly answered, "The Russians are sensible people. Not all of them, it's true. The older ones are sensible. Take Los—he is a man who understands life. A Russian who was younger wanted to take a picture of the whale. What a look Los gave him! He forbade him to take a picture. 'Oho!' I thought. After that I decided to help him remake life. Here it is, the little book—it's called a card—the bearer of a good spirit," Liok said, showing his Party card. "I am a 'forward-going' man. That's the kind of a book it is!"

Alitet took the little red book, turned it over and over in his hand and scrutinized Liok's photograph.

Liok pursued:

"I heard that Brown hasn't come again. Men say he has become a deceiver. He is a Merican, is he not?"

Alitet returned the card to Liok, drew a deep puff at his pipe and took long council with himself. He was ashamed to admit that the American had tricked him. At length he said:

"I guess the schooner must have broken. Never mind. I have decided to bring my furs to you. While you're friendly with the Russians you will buy me goods. You will give me half and keep half for yourself. I am

at enmity with them and they don't want to trade with me."

"Oh! That will be a lot of goods. You have furs from all over the tundra."

"Yes, a big lot."

"And half the goods for me? But what will I do with them? Trade? I don't like trading. I am a great hunter!" Liok said proudly. "Let the Whitefaces trade, they make their goods themselves. I make only straps and exchange them for reindeer skins which I need for living. I have no need for a lot of goods."

"You won't trade. You can exchange the goods for live reindeer. Or do you not care to have a big herd? Does not every coast man dream of it?"

"A herd of reindeer?" Liok asked with curiosity. "You want to make me a gift of a reindeer herd? I can't seem to understand it. Am I your kinsman?"

"You will help me, and I you."

"I shall think it over. I will ask Los' advice. He is an understanding man. We have become friends."

"Don't ask his advice. I don't like the Russians," Alitet said, and a scowl darkened his features. "Tygrena has run away to them. I guess they will want to keep her near them. But I'll take her just the same. Why do they spoil people and violate the customs of our forefathers? How many winters I fed her! I dressed her in expensive clothes!"

"The customs of our forefathers should not be violated," Liok acquiesced. "The law is the law. If the old law passes away like a dying man, a new law should be born. A man cannot live without a law. Dogs live without a law. . . . And why did you violate the law of our forefathers? Why, eh? Was not Tygrena the promised wife of that youth from Yanrakenot, Aye? I heard that she was betrothed to him in childhood. Why did you take her away, eh?"

"I am rich. I have plenty of food. Could that Aye feed her?"

"They say he has now become captain of a little iron steamer. He has enough food now."

"I am used to Tygrena. I miss her. I'll take her away just the same."

"That is your lookout," Liok answered reluctantly.

"But you are my friend, Liok. The people listen to you. The Russians listen to you. You must spread a rumour down the coast that Tygrena should come back. Let this rumour go before me."

Liok said nothing, then, suddenly clutching his back, he began groaning:

"Ec-ee-ee! My back aches. My back aches from work. I think of making a wooden whaleboat. Los promised to get me boards."

A woman set mugs on the table and began to pour tea.

"Let us better have tea," Liok said.

Alitet suddenly rose.

"I do not want tea. I am in a hurry. I will go now."

"H'm. . . . You think you can fool Liok? No, you cannot. And I am supposed to believe that you do not want tea. Well, hurry off, hurry off!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

After the holiday Los held a meeting of the Revcom at the construction site at which decisions were adopted for liquidating the temporary hospital at Loren and transferring the Red Cross team to the newly constructed hospital of the cultural service base. A similar decision was adopted in regard to the trading post. It was resolved to speed up the construction of the boarding school and the veterinary-zootechnical station.

Work on the construction site went on without interruption, despite a blizzard that blew up. Andrei Zhukov threw himself into his new work. Dwelling houses were still to be built. Although work was making good progress, Andrei felt a great need for Los' advice.

"Come and see us more often, Nikita Sergeyevich. I'm not much of an administrator and executive, you know."

"That's all right, Andrei. Don't be too modest. You are doing splendidly. You've taken the right line. Just a little more firmness in putting it through, more punch."

They were standing out in the snow next to a rising log frame. Los put his hand on Andrei's shoulder and continued:

"Be bolder, Andrei, old man! Be more sure of yourself. Don't ride the high horse, but keep the foreman busy on the job. Demand fulfilment of schedule, blizzard or no blizzard. Don't lose your grip and keep the reins taut, otherwise you'll find yourself up against all kinds of excuses—the North, blizzards, fatigue, and what not. Well, that's that, Andrei Mikhailovich!"

Los winked knowingly and added:

"And in a month from now I'll call you and the foreman out to the Revcom to report on the work."

"And whip us up?" Andrei asked with a wink.

"Yes. Now about the training courses. Bear in mind that you've got to get motorists trained by the beginning of the hunting season on your part of the coast, and no buts about it. Osipov will soon be coming down here. Aye is enthusiastic about it, but he still needs a lot of help himself, though he has become a very important fellow lately. He's growing by leaps and bounds. We're going to have splendid workers!"

"I'll say! He's now a 'wife-having' man, and has a son too," Andrei said gaily.

"And you must fix Tygrena up with some sort of job, Andrei. I like that girl. She'll make good. Plenty of grit."

"I've spoken to the doctor already. We're going to employ her as attendant."

"That'll do for a start. Let her get the run of things and learn a bit, and when the Revcom becomes the District Executive Committee we'll get her elected to it. She'll make a splendid worker! She craves the new way of life—it's in her blood."

And yet life in the wooden yarang struck Tygrena as very queer and funny. It was all so unusual. She found it hard to drop old habits. At first this new life tired her out, and she was surprised that Aye had so quickly fallen into these new habits. For all that, life with Aye, for whom she had yearned so strongly, was very good. With him she could get used to anything.

One day Aye came in with a teen-age girl and said:

"Tygrena, this is Bertha. Rultyna has let her go for one winter. Let her live with us and play with Aivam. The child should not be left alone when you go to the hospital. There is a hook on the door, see? When we are not here the door can be locked. That is how the Tangs live on the Mainland."

Tygrena burst out laughing.

"No bear will come here..." Then the frightening thought suddenly flashed through her mind, "What if Alitet comes to steal Aivam?"

She went up to the door and examined the hook.

"Bertha, this is how you should close the door. If you hear my voice or Aye's then you open it."

Aye dragged in a "stand"—a bed on tall legs—and as an expert on Tang life, began making it.

He took Aivam, placed him in the little bed and said "Let him live the new way, too, Tygrena."

The little boy laughed.

"Aye, he is too little to live the new way. He will fall out and break his leg. Then he won't become a hunter."

"No, there are bars here. The Russian craftsman made them for me. Look how strong they are. Aivam won't want to fall out himself. He understands everything now."

Aye made frequent trips to the neighbouring settlements on all kinds of Russian affairs and always brought back seal meat. Sometimes he did not come back for two or three days. Tygrena then was sad.

"Bertha," she said one day, "Aye will soon come back. Let us make Tang food."

"Let's. I saw the way Rultyna used to make special food for Charlie."

"I've seen it too. The Merican Jim taught me."

Tygrena was thrown into considerable confusion when Natalia Semyonovna caught her in the act of chopping meat. She was ashamed to be seen at such work. She swiftly covered up the venison and hid it away in a corner.

Natalia Semyonovna, not to embarrass Tygrena, went up to Aivam and began playing with him. He laughed and held out his arms to her, saying something in Chukchi. Tygrena, concealing a smile of happiness, kept watching them. It pleased her that Natalia Semyonovna was fond of Aivam. They still understood each other poorly, but laughter cemented their feeling of mutual sympathy.

Natalia Semyonovna had brought some cotton print, and pointing to Aivam she tried to explain to his mother that it was for the child's underwear. She cut out a shirt and she and Tygrena began sewing it together. They sewed and laughed in order not to keep silent.

In the evening Natalia Semyonovna brought a little tub, poured in some warm water and sat Aivam in it. The boy burst into tears and cried loudly. Tygrena could barely restrain herself from snatching her son out of Natalia Semyonovna's hands. But Aivam suddenly stopped crying and began to laugh.



He splashed the water all over the room like a duckling in a puddle.

"Good, Natasha, good!" Tygrena said in Russian, though deep down in her heart she did not approve of this idle pastime.

The child nevertheless was none the worse for it. One would think that he had really been born for the new life. After the water he slept very soundly. Tygrena went to the hospital, where she was on duty that evening.

Clad in a white smock drawn tightly about the waist with a belt, she seemed to have gained in stature. All around her were jolly simple folk. Tygrena too felt jolly.

"So this is it, the new life!" she thought.

Following Tygrena with his eyes, the doctor remarked to his trained nurse:

"Just look at Madame Aye. What clothes do to you women! They completely change your appearance."

"Somehow you're starting to look in her direction too often, Doctor," the nurse said. "I guess I'll have to send your wife a telegram."

"Nothing to be surprised about. She's an attractive woman."

The doctor allowed Tygrena to visit Aivam during work hours, and she often ran home in the frost, dressed only in her smock and white kerchief. Aye liked to see her in that costume and called her a Russian shaman-woman. Tygrena laughed. She would take her smock off, put it on Aye, laughing heartily while she tied the belt. Aivam laughed too.

Aye would blow out his cheeks with an important air, look at himself in the mirror and burst out laughing himself.

"Aye, teach me quickly to speak Russian. It is tiresome to work in the hospital only with your hands and eyes."

Late one evening she ran in from the hospital, noisily threw open the door in the corridor and came face to face with Alitet.

She went pale and recoiled. She stared speechless at Alitet's scowling face.

Alitet's beady eyes in their narrow slits glared wickedly.

"Who has wrapped you in this white snow-like cloth?"

Tygrena stood as if paralyzed, unable to utter a word. Her eye caught the glittering brass ring of the Remington knife hanging from Alitet's belt.

"You have ceased to be a Chukchi woman and are not afraid to violate the law of our people, eh? You think your mad conduct finds favour with the spirits?"

Tygrena stepped back a pace. She wanted to scream, but the sound died in her throat.

"Do not shrink from me. I am your husband. You have been eating meat in my yarang for many years. And did not Kamenvat during his lifetime receive payment from me—four dogs? Take off those trashy clothes at once and let us leave this accursed place. You will perish here! The evil spirits have been disturbed by your conduct. I have sixteen dogs in my sledge team."

Tygrena, throwing back her head, stepped up to Alitet and looked him defiantly in the face.

"No! . . . You are not my husband!" she shouted. "My husband is Ayel . . . You stole me from him. You yourself violated the law of our people!"

Alitet thrust her violently aside and darted to the street door.

Tygrena, mustering all her strength, suddenly pushed him out of the way and dashed into the street. She ran to Natalia Semyonovna without glancing back and burst

into the room, her face pale and panic-stricken. She rushed to Natalia Semyonovna, flung her arms around her and whispered through her tears:

"Natasha, it is good not!"

"What's the matter, Tygrena? Has anyone hurt you?" Natasha asked in a startled tone.

"Aye not here," Tygrena said in Russian.

Natalia Semyonovna stroked her back and said in a gentle, sympathetic tone:

"He will soon come, my dear. What a silly child! He has gone away only for three days with the chief of the militia. They will be back today. The weather is good and the trail is an easy one. . . ."

Alitet's voice was heard in the corridor:

"What door did Tygrena go through?"

Tygrena stiffened, then ran swiftly to the door and threw on the hook, holding it down with both hands.

"Alitet," she whispered in alarm.

"Alitet?" Natalia Semyonovna repeated in surprise. "That's all right, Tygrena. Let him come in. You needn't be afraid!" and she firmly pushed Tygrena aside, intending to open the door. Tygrena, however, clung to the hook with all her strength.

"You are a talkative woman when you do not see Alitet," she said with fierce intensity. "Now that you have heard his voice you are scared and wish to yield him the way. You are weak, it seems, like the doe before the wolf. I shall not be the cause of your fear. Let him come in!" Tygrena slipped off the hook and threw open the door.

"Come in here!" Natalia Semyonovna said in a commanding tone. "What do you want of Tygrena?"

Alitet, his face transfigured by rage, did not bestow a glance on the Russian woman. He hissed:

"You are a woman! It is a waste of words talking to you. A blight has been put upon you. I shall take you to

my yarang." Saying which he swiftly seized Tygrena's arm.

Natalia Semyonovna got between them and tried in vain to free Tygrena's arm from his grip.

"What does this white-faced woman want?" Alitet snarled. He pushed Natalia Semyonovna with all his strength, sending her sprawling on the floor.

Aye came running in at the noise—he had just arrived.

"Call Los, quick!" Natalia Semyonovna cried.

"Wait a minute, Natasha," Aye said, and turning to Alitet he said in a quivering voice:

"You have forgotten that I am no longer a white fox and you a wolf? Let Tygrena's arm go!" he shouted, and without further warning he seized Alitet by the throat.

Alitet twisted free and they both crashed to the floor. Natalia Semyonovna rushed out and began calling for help.

Aye and Alitet rolled on the floor, while Tygrena seized Alitet by the leg and began dragging him towards the door.

Los came running in accompanied by Andrei and the chief of the militia

"Arrest him!" Los commanded.

Alitet stood panting in the middle of the room, wiping the sweat from his face.

"Chief!" he said. "Tygrena is my wife. You saw her yourself in my yarang."

"Take him away!" Los shouted.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Something amazing had happened on the coast. The Russians had locked Alitet up in a wooden yarang, and he sat there like a seal in a net. The news spread like wildfire, magnified by monstrous rumours.

Alitet was on everyone's tongue in the yarangs of the sea hunters, among the trappers, at meetings on the trail, in the depths of the tundra and wherever men came together in a company of two or three.

The shamans said that the Russians were building strong wooden yarangs in order to catch and lock up Chukotsk people in them.

People dare not live now on the big rivers. The Russians would come down in the summer on their self-going whaleboats and seize all the reindeer breeders in order to do away with them. The reindeer men must not live in big encampments. They must break up in small camps of one or two yarangs, not more. The Russians want to destroy the herds.

Others said this could not be so, because Los and Andrei were friends of the Chukotsk people.

A difficult situation arose. Even the news about the Big Feast was as though eclipsed.

Los paced his room, discussing the situation with Andrei, Yarak, Vaamcho and Aye.

"You must let Alitet out. Let him go away from here," Yarak proposed. "All this talk is because of him."

"It will be very bad to let him out," Vaamcho said, deeply agitated. "There will be still worse talk."

Aye, feeling himself the culprit of all this to-do, sat in silence.

Los stopped next to Andrei and said, "D'you see, Andrei, this is when the revolution begins here! It is the real struggle. We must enter it cleverly. This kulak and shaman rumpus must be opposed by something very weighty."

"I think it would be a big mistake just to let Alitet go and nothing else," Andrei said. "We should arrange a public inquiry into Alitet's crafty and deceitful life. What do you think, comrades?"

"That's right, that's right!" Aye exclaimed. "We should tell people the truth and show it to them."

"Look here, my friends," Los said. "I haven't the slightest doubt that we shall dispel all these absurd rumours. And very quickly too. We shall hold a public trial. The important thing is to get as many people as possible from different places to attend it. Aye is right—let the people themselves have a look at Alitet and hear what he has to say for himself. Let the people see what he really is. We'll tell him the story of his life to his face and in front of all the people, a life built on deceit and violence. Let him show himself up. We'll make him talk. But his judges should be men of authority, men like old Ilyich, say, and Liok. That's very important now. We must get Liok to come at all costs."

"That is very good, Nikita Sergeyevich!" Aye burst out enthusiastically.

"Now, comrades," Andrei said, "all three of you will have to start out at once in different directions and invite people to the inquiry into Alitet's life."

The young men instantly departed.

"Living notices, Andrei, old boy," Los said with a smile, gazing after them. "And you, you give orders for that son-of-a-bitch Alitet to be fed as much as he can eat. So that he won't come to the trial looking starved. Heard what they're saying? That we don't give him anything to eat."

"Don't you worry. He puts down food like a starved wolf. Drinks a whole kettle of tea after each meal. 'I live in a wooden yarang,' he says, 'so give me Tang food, with salt.'"

"Tygrena should play no small role at the trial. A great deal depends upon her. Will she stick to her guns? If she doesn't, one big mess may result."

"Nikita Sergeyevich, what do you mean? Tygrena Alitet's irreconcilable enemy. Her whole life depends on

it. I've already had a talk with her. And now Natalia Semyonovna is with her. Tygrena doesn't let her out of her sight. How do they ever understand each other?" Andrei said, spreading out his hands.

"It couldn't be otherwise, Andrei, old man. The striving for freedom is inherent in every honest person, irrespective of his level of development. Let's drop in to see her!"

They went into the next room.

"Well, how's life, Tygrena?" Los asked.

"Why did you send Aye far away?" Tygrena asked in alarm. "Isn't Alitet here? He is probably very angry now. He will break up the wooden yarang and get out. He is strong. Trouble may happen."

"Don't worry, Tygrena. He won't get out. A militiaman is watching him."

"If he comes to me I will shoot. Look, Aye left me his rifle."

"Tell her that I'll spend the night with her," said Natalia Semyonovna.

When Andrei had translated this, Tygrena looked at Natalia Semyonovna and said in Russian:

"Good, Natasha."

CHAPTER TWENTY

The news of the inquiry into Alitet's life came at an unsuitable time. There was an unusually big incursion of polar foxes. Foxes even ran into the settlements and were caught by dogs. It was a rare trapper who did not come home with a catch. Sometimes as many as two or three foxes were caught in the traps of a single hunter. Driving up to his yarang the hunter would shout from afar, "I have brought another fox!"

The frozen animal would be warmed up in the polog, and the trapper, laying it on his knees, would carefully

peel off the precious skin. He would deftly slit open the skin with the point of a knife, beginning from the lips, and peel off the pelt as one pulls off a stocking, laying bare by degrees the reddish flesh of the little carcass. Then he would draw the pelt onto a stretcher and cry gaily, "Forty bricks of teal!"

How is that? Wherever Alitet went he had said that the polar fox would soon disappear from the tundra, because the Russians didn't care for polar foxes, and there weren't any more Mericans.

And here suddenly was such an unheard-of swarm of polar foxes!

What was to be done now? Yarak, who bought the fox pelts, said that everyone was to go to the inquiry into Alitet's life. Oh, that was very interesting news! The news would come to them, of course, later on, but it was twice as interesting to hear it oneself. And though it was the height of the trapping season folks made up their minds



to ride out to the cultural service base. The women could look after the traps for a few days. Hadn't the Enmak women engaged in trapping all the winter? Besides, you couldn't offend Yarak, once he had invited you. After all he was a trading man. You shouldn't anger a man like that.

The women lent an eager ear to the thrilling news that was current along the coast. Many took a keen interest in Tygrena's fate. Some were curious as to how it would all end up, others sympathized with Tygrena.

Aye told people that Alitet had come to take Tygrena away again, but the new law had stood up for her.

On the day of the trial sledges rode up to the cultural service base one after another from early morning.

The inquiry into Alitet's life was opened at noon. The big room in which the trial was to be held was filled with people. Everybody waited with impatience. "What is going to happen? What is this inquiry?"

Los sat at a separate table on a little platform, looking very grave and severe. On one side of him sat Ilyich, on the other, Liok. The old men were fully alive to the importance of the occasion. They were to decide whether Alitet's life was right or wrong. So Los had said when he took his place at the table.

Alitet came in escorted by a militiaman. He was conducted to the front and seated on a separate bench.

The people stood up, staring at Alitet as though they had never seen him before. Everybody whispered, and the whispers merged into a sound like the breaking of the surf on a calm day.

"Look, look, he has not grown thin at all! They said the Russians did not give him food. That was false news somebody started"

"Ho, he's receiving a special honour! A bench all to himself. Sitting separate from all the people. Do the Russians think of making up with Alitet?"

Los got up, holding a paper in his hand, and told what Alitet was being accused of. Then he turned to Alitet.

"Defendant Alitet, have you any questions to the court?"

"What is it—'court'?" the latter uttered slowly.

"Stand up when you are speaking to the court."

Alitet threw glances about him without getting up, then said after a pause:

"Why should I stand up? The tongue wags in a man's mouth the same way, whether he stands or lies or sits. Why should I stand? Everyone is sitting, look."

"Let him sit, as long as he keeps his ears open," Ilyich said.

"Comrade Ilyich, you'll have your word afterwards," Los broke in.

"Why afterwards! I have a fancy to speak now. I know that Charlie very well. He took two of my best dogs away from me—that was a long time ago," the old man said with warmth. "Took them for nothing! Took them with a laugh!" he shouted in a rising voice.

"Comrade Ilyich, you'll have your say about this later on," Los reassured him trying to maintain at least elementary order in the conduct of the proceedings.

The old man, however, had got his dander up, and nothing now could stop him.

"No! No! I want to speak now," he said doggedly.

"Let Ilyich speak," Liok pronounced gravely.

Los was obliged to assent.

Alitet, who was closely watching everybody, scowled at old Ilyich. It seemed to him that Los was defending him against the old man's attacks.

Remembering that all those who had wanted to speak at the Feast of the Big Speaking had stepped up to the edge of the platform, Ilyich got up somewhat hurriedly and shambled forward. Addressing the audience, he began in a very quiet voice:

"People! Look at him, at that man. Is he, Charlie, a good man? No, he is not. Did he take my dogs? He did. Everyone knows if. Did he take Pananto's lead dog

from him? He did. And changed its name too—called the dog Charlie. And he calls himself by that name too.”

“I have dropped that name. I have become Alitet again!” the defendant shouted.

“Eh?” Ilyich was surprised. “I haven’t heard this news.”

“That’s so,” Liok confirmed. “The Mericans have deceived him, and he’s again become Alitet!”

“All right. Let it be Alitet,” Ilyich said, slightly disconcerted. Then, straightening his belt, he went on: “Who poured Tang lamp fat over Vaamcho’s bait at the Three Hills? He did, Alitet,” and the old man pointed an accusing finger at him. “Or is he a good trading man? Who buys fox pelts better? Alitet or Yarak here? Eh?” Ilyich paused with an expectant smile, as though he had hit upon the most serious accusation. “He took pelts for next to nothing. Every man sees that now. He is a bad man, Alitet, from every side. He tramples the truth with his feet and carries deceit high in his hands. Who took the woman Tygrena away from Aye by force? Alitet did. He violated the custom of our people. Why did he take Tygrena away from Aye? Was not Aye her promised husband, betrothed to her in childhood? Let Tygrena say with her own tongue—did she want to become Alitet’s wife or not?”

Ilyich applauded himself and went back to his seat.

Alitet rose, pointed at Ilyich and said:

“Umkatagen is lying!”

“There is no Umkatagen here,” Los broke in.

Ilyich fidgeted in his seat, then raised himself up and, fixing his keen eyes on Alitet, declared:

“Aha! Hear that? Here Ilyich spoke. He spoke only the truth. He has never yet spoken a lie. There used to be an Umkatagen—I knew him—but he also did not like to speak lies.”

"Chief," Alitet said, addressing Los, "before everyone used to say that Alitet was a good man. I know myself that I am a good man. And Liok, my friend, knows that I never refused anyone a piece of meat and fat when hunger came to men's yarangs. I gave goods without payment."

"I have ceased to be your friend," Liok threw in.

Alitet fell into an embarrassed silence and then began to speak about Tygrena.

"She is too young, and has little sense. She is a woman. She was never hungry in my yarang. If a dog disobeys his master everyone knows that he should be whipped. And so I am taking Tygrena back. Many hunters did not have enough food for one wife. I always had plenty of food in my yarang, and so I took Tygrena for my second wife. Was she any the worse for it? Or did she sit hungry in my yarang?"

"Then why did Tygrena run away from your yarang, and not once but many times?" Los interrupted him.

And again it seemed to Alitet that Los was supporting him.

"Yes, yes. Why did she run away?" he said eagerly. "Because she has little sense."

Everyone knew that the Russian chief did not like Alitet. Everyone expected to hear harsh words from him; instead of which he was speaking to Alitet calmly, like a hunter who had met a friend. It was hard to understand these Russians! Alitet himself was surprised, and he grew emboldened as he went on. Never, thought Alitet, had they spoken to each other in such a cordial tone.

"Sit down, Alitet," Los said. "Tygrena, tell the court why you did not and do not want to live in Alitet's yarang."

"You must not ask a woman!" Alitet shouted, now showing a bold front.

"Sit down and hold your tongue!" Los said, raising his voice.

Tygrene got up. She threw Alitet a look of hatred and stood silent, as though mustering up courage to speak. Her bosom heaved.

"Speak, Tygrene. Say everything," whispered Aye, who was sitting behind her.

Tygrene began:

"My father Kamenvat was a poor man. He was poor because he had grown old. He took goods from Alitet, took them a long time ago, but couldn't pay pelts for them. He could no longer go out trapping. And so Kamenvat was afraid of Alitet. Kamenvat's heart thought with mine, but his tongue spoke what pleased Alitet. And so Alitet took me, by force. I began to live with him. Then his friend Echavto came to us—a trashy old man. And Alitet gave me to him in the night. That night I ran away to my father Kamenvat. Alitet took me back again. It got worse. A flame burned my heart. Again I ran away and again Alitet brought me back. Another wife appeared in the yarang—the sister of the first. They two were friendly, like the fingers of one hand. And I used to go out hunting. I froze, sitting amid the ice, but I had no desire to go home. I brought in a lot of seals. Alitet lies that he fed me. I fed myself and provided food for his dogs as well. He had four dog teams. They needed a lot of food. People know how much game I brought home."

"Tygrene, tell the court: do you want to go back to Alitet or not?" Los said.

"No! I do not!" Tygrene cried. "If you too wish to send me back to Alitet I will better throw myself from the cliff."

"Chief," Alitet said, "she is a woman. You must not ask her. Does the master ask his dog where he wishes to go? Her tongue has grown too talkative. Ha, ha! She

has forgotten that I gave payment for her. I did not take her for nothing. I gave four dogs, and forgave Kamerivat, her father, a big debt."

Tygrena was deeply agitated. Her heart hammered wildly, and she had an impulse to jump up and speak, but Aye restrained her.

"Wait, Tygrena, wait! Let Alitet speak. Los does not believe him all the same," Aye whispered.

It seemed to Tygrena, however, that this inquiry would end with her being returned to Alitet, and there was a fiery tumult in her bosom.

Los interrupted Alitet and said:

"Tygrena, you need not worry. Nobody will force you to go back to Alitet against your wish."

The inquiry into Alitet's and Tygrena's life lasted until evening. Never had there been such an inquiry on this coast. Oh, how much news came to light here! Very interesting news. Mary told the court how Alitet brought Tygrena to Charlie Red Nose and how Aye had a fight with him. Then Los' wife, Natalia Semyonovna, made a speech as public prosecutor. She spoke with great warmth and indignation. Andrei interpreted her words and the people listened on untiringly.

"Big news! Unprecedented news! It was worth coming for the sake of such news. We didn't come for nothing. So that is it, the new law! It stands up for the poor," men said.

The court passed judgment to annul the marriage between Alitet and Tygrena, to grant Tygrena a share of Alitet's property and release Alitet from custody.

Deeply stirred by these amazing happenings, men hurried back to their settlements to communicate the news about the inquiry into Alitet's life. Ai, what news it was!

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Alitet's mind was in a whirl. He himself was convinced that he was a good man, yet people had said bad things about him. "What is the matter? Have their eyes gone bad so that they cannot see? Or have they forgotten how Alitet helped everybody? He never refused people either goods or food! What is wrong with them? Have they ceased to be real men? And Liok? Where have his brains gone to?"

"Those Russians, I guess they will very soon begin spoiling the hill people too."

With a heavy sigh Alitet walked out of the house and went alone straight to his dogs.

"No, there in the hills it will be harder for them," he thought as he walked. "The owners of big herds will not pay much attention to them. They made a Soviet in Echavto's encampment, but he chased the herdsmen out. Echavto understands everything."

Off to one side Alitet noticed Liok examining some boards sticking out of the snow. Liok bent over, grunted and pulled out a board. He inspected it with an expert eye, tried to bend it and then decided that if the board were soaked in hot water, like the runners of sledges, it would bend well.

Alitet came up to him.

"Liok," he said, "you have stopped being my friend?"

Liok fixed his eye on him and said gravely, with a sense of superiority:

"Yes, I have."

"Why?"

"You are a wrong man."

"I also have ceased to count you as my friend," said Alitet, bewildered. He went to his dogs.

Liok picked up the board, just to occupy himself with something, braced one and tried to bend it again. The

board gave in the middle. "Alitet is being bent like this," Liok thought.

Alitet caught sight of his dog team at a distance. He had not seen the dogs for several days and was worried that they had grown altogether thin, for surely they had not been fed. But as soon as he came nearer his fears vanished: the dogs looked well-fed. They rushed up to him and threw their husky paws on his chest, back and sides. He stood surrounded by his dogs and stroked their muzzles.

A lad came up with a basin of seal meat and began throwing chunks to the dogs. They did not go away from Alitet, however.

Alitet recognized the lad. He was Chovka, from the settlement of Yanrakenot.

"Chovka, why do you feed my dogs?" Alitet asked. "Or do you look upon them as your own?"

"No, I do not look upon another's dogs as my own. Andrei told me to feed them."

"Andrei?" Alitet queried in wonderment.

"Yes, Andrei."

"What is this?" Alitet thought. After what had happened in the court he could find no explanation for Andrei's action.

He stood lost in thought for a long time. Then he felt the back of each dog.

"They are well-fed. Give me the basin. I want to feed them myself."

Holding the basin in one hand, Alitet threw chunks of meat into the jaws of the dogs with the other. They wolved down the meat and waited, their eyes glistening for more.

Before leaving, Alitet decided to seek out Andrei and have a talk with him. What could have prompted Andrei to feed his dogs?

He found Andrei in a bright, spacious room on the walls of which hung many papers of various colours. Strange Russian faces looked down from some of the papers. There were chairs in the room, like in Charlie Red Nose's room. Alitet sat down in a chair.

"Why have you come?" Andrei asked drily.

"Chief," Alitet said, "I will soon go home. You acted well towards my dogs. Like a real man."

"Get going, get going. Only remember that if you don't give Tygrena part of your belongings the militiaman with the moustache will come, and then it'll be worse for you. Do you understand?"

"Good. I will give you many foxes. I will give you all I have. Because now I do not need them. The Mericans have deceived me. I will give them to you. Only tell Tygrena that she should get ready to go with me. I will be lonesome without her. She is a woman, but in her head there is more sense than other women have. I need her."

"She will never return to you."

"If she does not return your stream will run red with blood in the spring!" Alitet threatened.

With a laugh Andrei rose. Walking over to a big map on the wall, he said:

"Look. All these are rivers--the Yenisei, Lena, Indigirka, Kolyma, Chaun, Amguema. They are very big rivers."

"I know the Amguema. I have travelled on it many times."

"And they never yet ran red with blood," Andrei went on. "We know very well that our stream won't either."

Ios entered. At the sight of Alitet he frowned. "What's going on here?" he asked sternly.

"He's trying to frighten me that the stream will run red with blood in the spring," Andrei said in Russian.

"Get out!" Los shouted at Alitet. "And I never want to see you here again!"

Alitet's features twisted with fury. He walked out quickly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Alitet realized that Tygrena was lost to him, as was trading too. He decided to leave immediately for Enmakai. In the street he met Chovka and bade him harness the dogs.

"Alitet," Chovka said, "I have just been to Aye's yarang. Tygrena is sitting there. She said: 'Let Alitet take the dogs on which I came from Enmakai.' She said the dogs were yours. She does not want them to be here."

"Hitch them to my team, and put some meat in the sledge for the journey," Alitet said.

Not waiting for the morning, he rode out that very night. The sky was clouded, the stars were hidden and darkness hung over the earth. In the silence of the night the dogs set out at a loping trot. He rode all night. Only towards dawn did he remind himself that the dogs had not been fed, but instead of feeding them he suddenly decided to drive all the way to Enmakai without making a halt. And he drove the team on like a madman. He had never treated his dogs so cruelly before. At times, without the slightest provocation, he threw his gee pole at them, and the light sledge, drawn by a team of twenty-eight dogs, flew swifter and swifter.

Neither at the trial nor during his subsequent talk with Andrei and Los had he been seized with such fury as that which took possession of him now in the solitude of these open spaces. At the thought of the Russians he flared up with a hatred he had never before experienced.

A mist crept up low over the ground in front of him. He was reminded of Bear's Ear Precipice, where he had



attempted the lives of Los and Andrei, and he savagely cursed himself "*Merkichkin*, I am!"

Sitting in the sledge, he suddenly brandished the gee pole and brought it down with all his might on the back of the shaft dog. The animal dropped with a yelp and was dragged along—it had lost the use of its legs. Alitet braked the sledge, unhitched the dog and flung it into the roadway. He sped on.

"It pains the eyes to look at Russians, the ears quiver to hear them speak. How could I have missed the sharp rocks at Bear's Ear that time?" Alitet thought. "And Brown? He is a deceiver, Brown! I sat in Bird's Beak Gorge from moon to moon waiting for him. And I sat in vain. They are all the same, these Tangs. They have spoilt the men of the coast. Even Liok! Now he calls himself a 'forward-going' man, he is the owner of a little red book with his one-eyed face built into it. The old life is breaking up. The old customs are still strong only in the hills. True, the Russians have started coming to the hills too."

Alitet gritted his teeth as he sat thinking in the silence of the night, "I must go away quickly to the hills, farther away from these Russians. To the hills they do not come very often. Echavto still has some of my reindeer. Papyle too. There are some reindeer with the small breeders too. I must occupy the best moss pasturages."

Arriving home, he woke up Narginaut and shouted: "You old seal! You sleep instead of meeting your husband! See to the dogs!" He threw himself on the skins without undressing and immediately fell asleep.

Early in the morning Alek woke Dvorkin.

"Teacher," she said in alarm, "Alitet has come back. I am afraid of him. He has come back alone. Now when he hears that the boy Goi-Goi has run away too he will grow angry and fill himself with firewater—then it will be bad for everybody."

"Where did Goi-Goi go?"

"No one knows. He heard from Narginaut that Alitet wants to take them all to the hills, so he ran away. Goi-Goi does not want to go to the hills."

"Where could he have gone to?"

"I don't know," Alek answered. "Maybe he is sitting somewhere amid the ice."

The teacher grinned. "No, Alek. He wanted to run off into the ice, but he is little, after all. He might perish amid the ice. I stopped him." Softly he added, "Goi-Goi is asleep in my room, Alek. Let him live with me..."

Alek was greatly surprised.

"I have brought Vaamcho's rifle—look," she said excitedly. "Keep it in your room. I guess Alitet will be very, very angry."

"That's all right, Alek. Don't worry. I have a rifle too. You say he has come alone, without Tygrena?"

"Yes, yes. Alone."

"I knew, Alek, that he would come alone."

"Are you a Russian shaman?" Alek asked in astonishment.

Dvorkin smiled.

"I am a teacher, Alek."

"Who knows what Alitet has in his mind? He will kill us."

"He will not, Alek," Dvorkin answered calmly.

Alitet slept for a long time. And throughout that time Narginaut was greatly worried: "How to tell Alitet that Goi-Goi has disappeared?"

When Alitet was drinking tea, Narginaut said:

"I haven't seen Goi-Goi for three days."

"Where is he?" Alitet asked drily.

"I don't know. Maybe he doesn't want to leave the coast to go to the hills. Maybe he has run away."

And to Narginaut's surprise Alitet said coolly:

"The whelp that doesn't intend obeying its master—let him run away."

Alitet got up and announced himself to be a shaman. Taking no food with him, he went to the cliffs for three days to commune with the spirits. He fasted for three days and came back haggard and in tattered clothes. And though he was hungry he did not ask for any food until evening. Not until night did Narginaut bring him seal meat.

"Mad woman, or do you think that I have grown poor that you wish to feed me with meat that can only gladden the belly of a mice eater of the coast? Give me reindeer meat!" Alitet shouted.

"Alitet, you are now a shaman. Shamans speak quietly," Narginaut reminded him discreetly.

"Give me reindeer meat!" Alitet shouted still louder.

"We have no reindeer meat. We must go and fetch the reindeer."

"Then we shall quit the coast this very night and go away to the hills for good."

"We shall not have time to collect our belongings. We have only three sledges left. You will not be able to take everything away. The yarang, the iron store...."

"You mad woman! What does a nomad need iron for?"

"The teacher will take it. Why leave it to him?"

"Oho! I guess you can give as good advice as Tygrena, who has become unreasonable and treacherous. Take a pickaxe, go to the sea and make a hole in the ice next to the hummock that resembles a dog. Two paces in length and one and a half in width. Go." And Alitet lolled back on the skins again.

His drawn cheeks twitched and his eyes darted excitedly in their narrow slits as he fumbled the sparse iron-grey beard which he had long neglected to cut.

"Drag all the posts from the store and the yarang and all the boards and logs into one heap. Make Attèneut do it. There will be a lot of work tonight."

When the settlement was deep in sleep, Alitet tore the corrugated iron from the store, and the women laid the sheets on the sledges and conveyed them to the sea where they had made a hole in the ice.

The framework of Alitet's trading store loomed in the darkness like the skeleton of a whale. When the last sheets of iron were carried down to the ice hole, Alitet hurried out there himself. He seized a sheet and gazed long at its wavy galvanized surface. Then he went up to the edge of the hole and threw the sheet in. It glided down and vanished in the deep. Alitet began throwing the rest in after it.

Narginaut hurriedly handed him the sheets. Her heart rejoiced. "A new life is beginning—a life without trade, without an iron store, a life such as all real people live. Oh, it will be a good, well-fed life near a large herd! There will be men who will want to live beside Alitet, to guard his reindeer and earn their food by staying near him."

The women hurriedly dragged the logs and boards together in one heap.

"Why do you bring them here? Take them to the lookout! They may want to use it. Stand the wood up on end round the lookout."

A gusty wind was blowing low over the ground.

Alitet worked furiously all night. Three sledges stood ready, loaded with household goods that were required for life in the hills.

The multicoloured wavering shafts of the northern lights appeared in the sky. The rim of the moon peeped out for a brief instant from behind a passing cloud. The wind howled.

Alitet came to the lookout tower carrying a tin of kerosene. He splashed it over the piled-up timber and threw a lighted match on it. A huge flame immediately enveloped the pile of dry wood.

Alitet stood by, watching this unprecedented bonfire with malicious glee. The tongues of shooting flame resembled some fabulous hundred-armed monster.

The women sat in the sledges gazing with fear at this awe-inspiring spectacle. The tower collapsed with a crash.

"That is all," said Alitet.

He ran to the front sledge, looked back at the bonfire as though in fear of the long shooting flames, then waved his gee pole and yelled wildly at the dogs.

THE END



